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AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE NEW

ARABIC POETRY IN EGYPT

Selected, translated,
with an introduction
by

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ARABIC POETRY
IN EGYPT

for a generation
fighting for a new idiom

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Preface

The idea of this book is easy enough to defend: the typical study of Arabic poetry stops at the second world war and, if they are covered at all, Egyptian poets are dismissed in a few hasty lines. A notable example is M. M. Badawi's *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*(1) where he uses 'modern' simply to mean recent. Ahmad Shawqi, Hafiz Ibrahim and Khaleel Mutran belong to twentieth-centruy Arabic literature but they cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be regarded as modern. The sense in which 'modern' is used today has come to be equated with 'modernist', and the concept has been redefined, the redefinition refined, to indicate specific qualities which are simply lacking in those poets. Of the two leading 'Modern' Egyptian poets — Ahmad Hijazi and Salah Abdul-Saboor — Badawi has little to say; of the generation that followed them he says nothing at all. Over the last ten years, a second generation has been active and influential enough to occupy the position held in the 1960's by the pioneers, the 'innovators' who introduced the 'New Poetry', relying as it did not merely on new verse forms but also on new concepts of art never before fully accepted in Arabic. The second generation I have in mind includes poets who are already

in their forties and fifties, and many others who are dead. Going over their work I have noticed that the classical Arabic poem has ceased to provide a frame of reference, positive or negative: they neither accept it as a model nor consciously reject it for its classical poetics. From the collections published in 1984-1985 one is compelled to conclude that their frame of reference is the European poem, though not necessarily the 'modernist' poem, initially made available though translation, but now primarily through the work of the first genration of Arabic modernists. So, while it was possible in the case of Salah Abdul-Saboor to trace Eliotic influences in his verse drama or Yeatsian personae in his longer lyrics, it is now mainly the Abdul-Saboor poem itself that must be ultimately examined for influences on the younger generation.

My contention is that there has been a marked reversion to romanticism in the post-Abdul-Saboor era, notwithstanding the obvious Modernist features of the verse, and that this has its roots in the poetry of Abdul-Saboor himself: his 'modern' spirit has romantic traits and, for all his innovations, his rhythms and the 'classical' diction he uses, he maintains in great measure the spirit of our tradition. The Introduction will deal with the specific character of this modernist-romantic amalgam in Abdul-Saboor, and the broad outlines of the romanticism that followed. The poems I have chosen are as illustrative of the argument as they are representative of the poets.

My method of translation requires an explanation. Though I have tried in the case of the major poets to be as faithful as I possibly could to the original Arabic, departing but little even from the line-divisions and the general poetic 'devices' used, I have otherwise allowed myself the freedom of seeking English *equivalents* for the metre, the rhyme and tone. Believing that the translation of poetry involved more than the rendering of the 'prose sense' of the words, I took the liberty of adjusting the poem, that

immaterial being, to the English flesh and blood it now has, sometimes by sacrificing a word here and a word there or by re-structuring a sentence or a syntactic mould. I tested my method in the only way it could be tested: I showed the translations to most of the poets themselves who approved, often wholeheartedly, of what I did. During a tour of the USA in 1981 some of the poems were read to large audiences, with satisfactory results; and a number of the poems then read, in the presence of Salah Abdul-Saboor, were subsequently published in *Nimrod,* a US periodical(2).

The poems translated give an adequate cross-section of the poetic trends and styles used after Salah Abdul-Saboor: where the work of a poet proved too varied to be represented by a single poem, I included others which should represent other facets of him. The number of lines translated is therefore not indicative of the literary status of individual poets, nor is the space devoted to the discussion of their work in the Introduction.

For considerations of space, the number of poems included has been severely restricted. Another volume is therefore planned which will present more verse and, perhaps, more poets.

I am indebted to my friend and colleague Dr. M. S. Farid for the biographical notes supplied, and above all, for his interest in the work and constant encouragement.

M Enani
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INTRODUCTION

The current confusion over the real character of the Arabic poetry written today (not only in Egypt, in fact) may be easily attributed to the use of a single adjective, 'modern' *(Hadith)*, in qualifying the 'new' *(Jadid)* verse. Today's verse is unquestionably new: it differs drastically from that produced no more than two generations ago by the pre-revivalists — those late nineteenth-century obscure poets who maintained, in doggerel, the traditions of the Mameluki and Turkish periods — or even by the revivalists, that is, those who tried, often with success, to revive the tradition of ancient Arabic poetry, led by al-Barudi, Shawqi, Hafiz Ibrahim and Mutran (extensively dealt with by Badawi)[(3)]. One must admire the ability of a poet living in the twentieth century to write in the same way as his forefathers in the sixth and seventh centuries — *and* succeed! Their verse was published in *al-Ahram*, and widely enjoyed by the elite. However, by 1930, as contacts with the West had enabled a different generation to read and translate English and French verse, new concepts came to be adopted and the efforts of a leading member

of that generation came to fruition. Al-Aqqad's revolt was romantic, pure and simple, and the concepts he advocated could directly be traced to Wordsworth and Coleridge(4). He attacked poetic diction, personification, the oratorical tone of the preceding generation, and insisted on the use of incidents from 'common life' in embodying the 'primal emotions of man': he adopted Wordsworth's definition of the poet(5), claiming that it had always existed in Arabic — the Arabic word for poet *(sha'ir)* simply means a 'man of feeling'. The cult of feeling is romantic enough, and the role of the poet as 'a man speaking to men' Wordsworthian. Al-Aqqad attacked Shawqi for not feeling deeply or rather for not showing that the felt deeply. Adopting a 'public voice', Shawqi reassumed the position of the Arab poet in ancient Arabia, more than fourteen centuries before, al-Aqqad maintained. He wanted Shawqi and all poets to aspire to 'sincerity' as an ideal(6), to be truthful to their emotions even when objective, and one way of doing this, he suggested, was to abandon the stereotyped idiom of the imitators, in favour of everyday language(7).

The critical efforts of al-Aqqad, who led the 'dissenting' *Diwan* school (Shukri and al-Mazini being his partners) combined with the work of a number of Western-educated young poets to set the scene for a romantic movement, and the Apollo Group of the 1930's was born. Their work has been examined and foreign influences on it traced(8), though the continuity of the Apollo spirit has been largely neglected, primarily because of the revolution in form mounted by the New poets. Interest has been deflected from the poetry to the verse form, wrongly referred to as 'free verse', which came to dominate the literary world in the 1960's, following a long period of experimentation. It may be

worth our while, therefore, to look at the salient innovations which thus blind us to the continuity.

As a new concept of poetry was adopted by the European-educated generation of the 1950's, which simply developed the Apollo concept of the 1930's, the Arabic poem ceased to be an open-ended collection of lines of equal length, sharing the same rhyme, with varying themes and became the record of an emotional experience in the modern sense, in lines of varying length, with a 'free' rhyme scheme, and a metre relying on the repetition of the same foot rather than on the traditional metrical structure where each line consisted of a fixed number of different (but occasionally similar) feet, arranged according to an unalterable prescribed pattern. Modern ideas, such as 'organic' unity, 'development' etc. came to be adopted too, and the critical scene brimmed with notions never before acceptable in Arabic. The late Professor Muhammad Mandur introduced the conept of 'whispered verse' as opposed to the oratorical tone of the revivalists(9) and Professor Lewis Awad introduced T.S. Eliot to the Arabic reading public for the first time in the 1940's with the accent on 'stress rhythm', *vers libre,* and other new verse forms, putting some of the new ideas into practice in his own *Plutoland*(10). Though not primarily a critic of poetry, the late Professor Rashad Rushdi popularized the criticism of T.S. Eliot in the late 1950's and early 1960's to such an extent that no serious

☆ The traditional **Qasidah** usually opened with a few lines on the beauty of the beloved, on the pangs of unrequieted love, sometimes on separation, then proceeded to a central subject usually of public interest, the accepted general genres being: the panegyric, the satire, the poem on the glories of the individual poet or his tribe, the virtues of ascetism, praise of Prophet Muhammad, love, or wine.

writer may be said to have escaped his influence (positively or negatively)[11]. Already poets who had studied English were showing willingness to experiment with the form of the Arabic poem — Ba-Kathir (Egypt), al-Sayyab and al-Mala'ikah (Iraq) — producing the first specimens of the new verse. At roughly the same time, Abdul-Saboor and Hijazi (Egypt) were undertaking similar experiments and the new form soon established itself.

The new form had 'modernist' elements, no doubt, and it did reflect the imagist ideal of ' composing in sequence of the musical phrase not in sequence of a metronome', as Flint had demanded[12] — a no mean achievement in itself — but it hardly heeded E. Pound's injunction: 'Don't chop your stuff into separate iambs. Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave'[13]. One or two examples will illustrate this point:

A basketful of lemons
Under the biting beam of the sun;
A boy in doleful tones
Cries out loud, 'twenty for a penny!
'Take twenty for a penny!'[14]

or the different

I leave my city
My old home,
Having thrown off the load
Of a painful life;
And under my garb
I hide my secret.
I buried it at the city gate,
Then had the starry sky for a garb.[15].

The general performance successfully aspired to the imagist principles stated almost 50 years previously such as, to quote Pound again, 'to use no superfluous word, no adjective which (did) not reveal something', to 'go in fear of abstractions', to 'use either no ornament or good ornament'[16]. The formal innovations were not confined to the prosody but included a new poetic idiom and a fresh manner of writing. The example of T.S. Eliot was everpresent in the minds and ears of the pioneers, as testified by Abdul-Saboor himself[17].

The early 1960's was a time of special significance for all Arabs. National feeling was intense and a sense of general 'awakening' was in the air. The gloom of much European 'modernist' poetry, explained not only in terms of the disillusionment of a whole generation with the War, with Western civilization, the social conditions obtaining in consequence, but also in terms of the 'New Philosophy' which banished God[18], was initially imported with the new forms and accepted as part of an alien, though fascinating, tradition. It soon became a literary vogue and, notwithstanding the genuine cheerfulness and the great hopes raised by the intelligentsia on the Revolution in the late 1950's, comparable only to the climate of feeling in England created by the French Revolution ('France standing on the top of golden hours / And human nature seeming born again'), the new poets wallowed in the imported bleakness, occasionally giving it the form of a romantic wistful melancholy. The gloom of the Western poet became an 'attitude', often affected but, strangely enough, sometimes genuinely embraced and transferred to local themes. Gradually, however, the bleakness gave way to poetic sadness of the purely romantic type: the despair gave way to hope, though the attitudinizing persisted. The surviving gloom in

contemporary verse may be occasioned by the new depressing conditions in today's world, and Egypt is no exception, but its roots must be traced as far back as the first impact of the modernist European verse on the first generation of new poets.

The adoption and 'adaptation' of bleakness to local themes is best exemplified in the theme of the 'heartless city' which dominates Hijazi's first volume of verse and gives it its title. Just as Eliot does, Hijazi creates a persona and an objective scene, alive with symbolic undertones. Eliot sees the city as a mass of undistinguishable faces, and city men as people without souls, having surrendered their individuality to a vast man-made creature; and he relates the aridity of city life to spiritual aridity, thus pointing the way to salvation and, which is more important for our purposes, presupposing the possibility of salvation. True, Eliot uses a modernist technique, relying on the subtle shift of emphasis, the contrasting ironic and high serious tones and, above all, the objective rendering of the scene; but his basic *Weltanschauung* is romantic, maintaining as he does primal faith in man's inner power and elevating religious faith to a position of an indisputable Absolute. By crying 'Unreal City' he confirms man's ability to have a 'real' city, and his references to the cities of antiquity suggest that they were, in one important sense, 'real'. He 'zooms' in on individual cases of life in the city only to show that they need not be negative images of man's existence; and 'What the Thunder Said' concludes *The Waste Land* on an optimistic note.

But Hijazi is no Eliot: though benefiting by the 'objective' technique and the general dramatic framework, he modifies the position of his persona to become openly Wordsworthian. He confronts the city not as a place where he *should* belong, as Eliot does, but as a place where no *real* man can belong. The romantic

streak in Eliot dominates the Hijazi scene, with the persona advancing to occupy the centre and become an alternative scene of action. So while Wordsworth places himself outside city 'walls', and greets the breeze in the 'glad preamble' to *The Prelude* as a symbol of liberation

> A captive greets thee, coming from a house
> Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free
> A prison where he hath been long immured.
>
> *Prel.* 1905,i.6 - 8

while he is relieved to be without a fixed dwelling place,

> Now I am free, enfranchis'd and at large,
> May fix my habitation where I will...
> The earth is all before me: with a heart
> Joyous, nor scar'd at its own liberty,
> I look about, and should the guide I chuse
> Be nothing better than a wandering cloud
> I cannot miss my way.
>
> *Prel.*, 1805, i, 9-10, 15-19

Hijazi places his persona within the city walls, and the voice heard is a thinly disguised personal one:

> This is I and this
> My city, at midnight!
> A vast square and the walls,
> A hill, appearing to disappear
> Behind a hill.
> A leaf circled in the wind,
> Settling but vanishing in the streets.
> A shadow melts, another extends,

In the eye of an intrusive, dull lamp,
Whose beam I stepped on,
Passing by, my heart overflowing
With a sad tune,
No sooner started than suppressed —
'Who are you? You there!'
Ah! the stupid guard cannot understand:
I have been kicked out of my room today,
Am lost, without a name.
This is I
And this—my city![19].

The counterpart is to be found, I believe, in Abdul-Saboor's 'Exodus', a poem where the same theme is handled in terms of the flight of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. While Hijazi does away with tradition altogether, placing his persona in a realistic scene, alive with symbolic details (with a tame ironic touch in the concluding lines) Abdul-Saboor's mythopoeic imagination turns the historical incident into a highly-charged emotional symbol. The scene in Abdul-Saboor becomes the individual himself, thus precluding the possibility of flight ('None is after me but my old self') — and the suggestion that it is also the flight of the Jews from Egypt that he has in mind (as confirmed by the title) lends support to this reading. The theme of departure is essentially romantic and, as W. H. Auden has convincingly shown in his *The Enchafed Flood,* a new note marks the romantic attitude in the nineteenth century, namely that 'an abiding destination is unknown even if it may exist'[20]. Baudelaire's *Le Voyage,* with which Abdul-Saboor was well acquainted, has the famous lines:

Les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-la seuls qui partent
Pour partir; coeurs legers, semblables aux ballons,

De leur fatalite jamais ils ne s'ecartent,
Et, sans savoir pourquoi, disent toujours: Allons!

And Wordsworth wonders:

What dwelling place shall receive me? In what vale
Shall be my harbour? Underneath what grove
Shall I take up my home, and what sweet stream
Shall with its murmur lull me to my rest?

Prel., 1805, i, 11-14

though he knows that 'the earth is all before (him)' and that it *should* belong to him, just as the newly-created world had belonged to Adam and Eve, and the allusion is significant:

The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest;

Paradise Lost, XII, 646-6

The romantic voyage is therefore to be undertaken for its own sake, and Abdul-Saboor accepts the theme with a slight modification. In his forced 'Exodus' from his 'old self' he has to be certain of a land of promise (the 'promised land'), but in the course of the poem this proves to be merely visionary:

The pains of my journey
Are my purgatory,
And death in the desert
Perpetual resurrection:
If I die I shall live
In the city of light,
The city of wakefulness,
Brimming, beaming,
With the sun fixed at noontide;
Oh, my city of light!

My visionary city
Imbibing light,
My visionary city,
Exuding light!
Are you an illusion,
A mirage, taunting a traveller lost?
Or are you real?[21].

The 'city of light' which now becomes 'visionary' is Medina: it is now transferred to a subjective level, gaining in symbolic value as an unattainable point in time. In other words it ceases to be a *real* city and becomes an idea, so that the real theme is now the flight from the past, witth te desert as the dominant image. Semiologically the desert is the Arabic equivalent of the sea[22], and Abdul-Saboor is only too conscious of this. In his *Sailing into Memory* the sea image is used in a modernist framework to indicate the impossibility of retrieving time; but both the irretrievable nature of time and the attempt to revisit it are romantic. Man, on his journey *to Time* is inevitably *halted:* the visit is typically interrupted by external forces which function as alien intruders on man's 'sacred privacy'. The 'halted traveller' image is central in Byron *(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage)* and Wordsworth *(The Prelude* and *The Excursion);* and the visitor-visited hero is essential to it[23]. Like Wordsworth Abdul-Saboor uses the imagery of light to stress the 'visionary' character of his *quest*, but unlike him, images of light function ironically to deepen the sense of loss, the darkness of the present[24]. The city, in the course of the poem, becomes one of the 'spots of time' revisited by Wordsworth[25] rather than an ancient city connected with a solid, established history. And the contrast with Byron's meditations on the past glory of the cities he visits can hardly be overemphasized: addressing the ocean, he declares:

Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee—

Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, IV, 182

and, in recalling the past of some of these cities, the meaning of revisiting them is projected onto a 'meaningless' present.

Hijazi's and Abdul-Saboor's poems share another romantic theme which is again modified by the modernist impulse—alienation. It is sometimes recurrent enough to make us conclude that it is more modernist than romantic, but this is deceptive. For underneath that feeling there is a yearning for belonging and, as the behaviour of the ambivalent imagery indicates, a craving for an attainable ideal. And it is this ability to fall back on an ideal, or an Absolute, that marks the romantic impulse, as Lovejoy has shown(26). There can be no better illustration of this than Abdul-Saboor's early 'Song for Cairo' which reads, in part:

Coming back to you, my city,
Is pilgrimage — O Wailing Wall!
Coming back to you, my city, is grief.
When through the darkness of the airport
I peered at your lights,
I knew I had been shackled
To the macadam roads,
To the squares in whose furnaces
The greenness of my days withers!
It is my fate, O opening wound,
That my return to you
With a thirsty soul,...
Should be my inspiration,
A hope that I should melt in you
At the end of time,
That the Nile, the islands,
The oil and the litter floating,

And the stones,
Should enshrine my broken bones,
Collected from the macadam roads,
From the corners of alleys and districts
Into an Egyptian-sycamore coffin!
Coming back to you, my city,
Wrenches my heart, pressing heavily,
Like desire, awe, and hunger!
Coming back to you purifies me —
A reunion of tears!

I love you my city...[27]

I have argued elsewhere[28] that this poem is a fine specimen of the New poetry, on account of its complexity of feeling and 'polyphonic' structure, to use the term applied by Fletcher to the 'imagist' verse collected by Amy Lowel and published as early as 1915[29]. I have pointed out the use of the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris and the symbolic undertones of its poetic application. I cite the above lines, however, to illustrate a different point, namely that belonging as an ideal was not abandoned by the New poets, that even though a reunion with the city should be an occasion for 'grief', for 'tears', for a complex emotion combining joy and sorrow, the certainty of belonging remains an ultimate and, for all the modification of the Wordsworthian image of the city, the modernist version maintains that hope and a certainty of unity.

Strangely, the traditionalist attack on the New poetry focused on the metrical innovations and ignored, almost totally, the changed concept of poetry responsible for them. The reason is that for all the 'classical' features of their verse, the traditionalists were romantic at heart, and had unconsciously accepted the En-

glish romantic poets as their immediate models. Their rejection of the 'modern' trend was partly motivated by their distrust of any 'form' that did not comply with their idea of poetry—the ancient definition of poetry being 'rhymed verse', pure and simple[30] — partly because they opposed any new form which, if established, could detract from the 'grand' performance of the poets of antiquity or render them obsolete. They did not want a great and original poet like al-Mutanabbi to sound antiquated or any of the revivalists (Ismail Sabri, Hifni Nassef on one end of the scale, and al-Barudi, Shawqi, Hafiz Ibrahim and Mutran on the other) to be given the place normally reserved for the 'ancient' poets in English, French or, worse still, Latin literature. But their attack, which included accusing the New poets of writing *vers libre,* prose poems or poetic prose, was too unsound to gain the support of the rising generation. Young poets of the 1960's knew that the New poetry, for all its metrical innovations, was not prose, and that its 'freer' rhyme scheme was more conducive to the producion of good poetry than the old, rigid rules of the traditionalists[31].

Though the days of the controversy are, in effect, over, the die-hard traditionalists continue to indite verses of the lowest order and to publish them in the national papers on public occasions (such as the Prophet's birthday, the National Day or, indeed, the victory of a local football club), or just to prove that they still exist. The trend has found supporters in a few editors of the literary departments in the magazines who advance theories based on non-literary considerations such as the need to consolidate Arab unity through the popularization of ancient linguistic and poetic styles or to preserve the tradition of our ancestors, for the sake of preserving it. The style they seek to popularize could never, however, be identified with the original, fresh, and vigorous style created by the ancients for their world. Shawqi made great efforts to adapt it to ours; but the excellent versifiers who

imitate Shawqi and the revivalists produce only a 'doughy mess' of third-hand Shawqi and fourth-hand Mutanabbi, 'blunted, half-melted, lumpy', as Pound said of the poetry of the nineteenth century(32). The sentimentality which Ford Madox Hueffer had attacked in the poetry of that period easily comes to the surface(33), and the conventional images of the panegyrics and satires have degenerated into cliches, the cliches into insipid verbiage. No wonder the Arab world is coming over consistently to the concepts of the New poetry, with most poets adopting the new verse. Indeed, individual poets have undertaken even bolder metrical innovations which, in spite of their mixed reception, have been studied in depth(34). The new frame of reference is no longer the poem written over a thousand years ago but the New poem written a few decades ago.

The paradox we live with today is, however, that the post-Abdul-Saboor generation is moving away from 'Modernism', strictly defined(35), and advancing in directions which must be seen as essentially romantic, being variations of the modernist-adapted romantic formula of the first generation. The Arabic poetry of today, primarily in Egypt but elsewhere in the Arab world as well, seems to have but few links with the Modernism, not to say the Post-Modernism, of the West. One would be hard put to it to establish a relationship, however tenuous, between a popular Egyptian poet like F. Guwaida and P. Larkin. This is, of course, an extreme case of contrast; but various levels and kinds of contrast exist between the most modernist of contemporary Arabic poets in Egypt and their counterparts in Europe and America, from Laurie Lee and Stanley Kunitz to Andrew Motion. 'Modern' Arabic poetry, that is, both the recently produced and the new poetry, has developed a new idiom for itself which in the case of some non-Egyptians (Adonis being an outstanding example) tends to favour ambiguity and the surrealistic image (at

least the Post-impressionist image-making technique often confused with Surrealism), and in the case of most Egyptians, Neo-Romanticism. I have called it 'Neo-Romantic' because the idiom of the second generation is easily related to that of the first with the ultimate reference to English and French romantic poets rather than to the European 'modern' poets who had influenced the work of the first generation. The gap which separates them from their contemporaries in Europe and America is too vast to allow any meaningful comparison: it certainly prevents us from regarding them as 'modern' in a European sense. The 'modernist' qualities they prossess are traceable, I have indicated, to the first generation, but they simply modify an inveterate romanticism We are now able to recognize their real antecedents because the new form has stabilized; the sense of novelty it once had has worn off and the true character of the poetic material handled within that form is now easier to perceive.

(ii)

If the road to the work of the second generation of New poets lies across the work of the first, a brief examination of say, Salah Abdul-Saboor's last volume of verse, *Sailing into Memory* must be helpful(36). The book which appeared in 1979, two years before the poet's death, includes poems composed between 1973 and 1978 and arranged more or less chronologically(37). I have chosen it not simply because it is more representative or maturer: it has the advantage of being contemporary with most of the verse translated for this volume, and thus could refute the suggestion that it was the 1970's that produced the neo-romanticism—the 1970's being a 'dark' period, currently avoided in literary studies, often blamed for a decline in the arts owing to the loss of our old 'sense of purpose', and a general cultural decline. The volume is important for our purposes too, because it

gives us a faithful picture of the wavering between Modernism and romanticism in Abdul-Saboor, as well as excellent specimens of the modernist-adapted romantic poem. Here is, to begin with, a modernist poem as advanced in technique as anything to be found in Pound; its title is 'Abstractions':

Abstraction I

A mood of yesterday
Is denied me today;
It gave me blissful sleep
And wakeful certainty.
I could fall down
From the surface of weariness
To the bottom of forgetfulness,
Or rise from the bottom
Of forgetfulness
To the surface of weariness;
I heard no echoes
But the echoes heard me;
I touched no 'thing'
But things touched me,
Squeezed me into air, blowing
Into nothingness.
How heavy my body feels tonight,
How heavy my body feels.

Abdtraction II

The sword of futility, falling
Between desire and action, unfolding
The desert of inaction, expanding
Between desire and usefulness.
What can a scared mouse do, tottering

Between the sword and the desert?
Hypothesis One:
Can evade the sword of futility,
Opting for futile action;
Hypothesis Two:
Can escape from the desert of inaction
To the bottom of apathy
Only to face
The sword of futility.
Hypothesis Three:
Can lie in the lap of futility
And apathy
And inaction
And die.

Abstraction III

O Lord!
You made me drink,
But when your wine seeped
Into the recesses of my soul
You sealed my lips,
And, here I am,
Stifled by silence,
And a lump in my throat —
My secret.

Obviously bold in its use of 'neo-metaphysical' imagery, the poem brings memories of Eliot's later period, the period of the *Quartets,* but is hardly 'imagist' in any common definition of the term. Indeed, the poem may be meant to be anti-imagist, as the title implies, and is deliberately provocative. The speaker begins by deploring the loss of a mood which had enabled him to over-come his sense of 'material existence', the consciousness of be-longing to the physical world and, consequently, to attain the

freedom of 'nothingness'. This is no doubt a paradox and we have to accept it as *presupposed:* such was that strange mood that it enabled him to be conscious or unconscious *at will*; to be, also *at will,* a receiver or a giver and, in sum, to exist or cease to exist. Now he can feel his body, he is willy-nilly conscious of his physical existence as part of the material world, so that what he is deploring could be his loss of freedom.

The word 'abstraction' itself functions at two levels: it essentially describes the mood, the quality of experience, that enabled him to escape the physical world; but it also refers to his use of abstract words in building up his unusual framework of imagery. Abstraction II is decidedly Eliotic in rhythm—but only in rhythm. The sense of frustration channelled through the apparently Eliotic imagery relates the poem thematically to Larkin rather than Eliot, especially as the hope which Eliot saw for humanity in communion, so typically Wordsworthian, is now shattered. Even before it is spelt out in the concluding lines a sense of Larkinian death looms large and gives the poem its peculiar modernist flavour.

The quiet irony of the last part, the keynote of which is struck by the play on 'O Lord!' (with a suppressed suggestion of the exclamatory 'Good Lord!') serves to balance the high-seriousness of the first two and gives added meaning to speech-in-silence. The recognition of man's helplesness in the face of an 'almighty power' is translated into images of speech and silence, with the accent on the power of the Word *(logos)* which man, as an image of God should be able to utter. But the image is deflated by the mundane, the all too mundane 'lump in my throat'. Put differently, the Word, as symbolic of creative power, which could have given man the status of a demiurge is now suppressed: the silence which he is now forced to accept 'bespeaks' his helplessness and

confirms his loss of choice. It becomes an indirect comment on the human situation in general.

The same modernist strain could be heard in another, equally impressive poem, in spite of the romantic wistfulness that pervades the concluding lines. Its title is 'Summing Up':

She called me the sandy man,
I called her the green lady;
We met, in my twilight, called
On each other, in childish joy,
Rather shyly, made our acquaintance,
Fascinated, we groped the colour
Of each other, and shared a name.

We parted.
Oh! don't ask what happens to things
When they crack,
Or to the echoes
When they fall down
In the fearful silence.

☆☆☆

And yet I remember that we
One evening did baffle
The scythe of the angel of death,
Stole away and, again,
Baffled the cock-crow of time,
To print on the wall of night
Two shapes, our shadows,
Two blended colours,
Spilt over the edge of a rumpled couch
And collapsed

Against the headrest of an armchair.
Now you watch me watch this painting
In my arid days and drink to it alone.

Oh pour a drink, please, for that painting.
It's my summing up.

The compactness, the solidity of the language, the sparing use of adjectives, all connect it with the mainstream of modernism, while the resolution of the 'action' into a single 'moment of meaning' shows how Abdul-Saboor could make use of a romantic device, namely the creation of metaphor through a few emotionally-charged words, which is not completely unknown to the modernists. The alternation of the modernist and romantic tones is so subtle in fact that it comes to constitute a 'modernist' device in itself. Initially, the process of alternation relies on ambiguity, then on metaphor, before the 'meaning' of the experience is allowed to come to the surface in the last four lines.

To begin with, what should we understand by the 'sandy man'? Is it to do with the 'colour' only, as in the case of the 'green lady'? Or should it have something to do with the 'twilight' (line 3) and the 'arid days' of the coda? Indeed, the quality of being 'sandy' or 'of sands' must be called in question insofar as it is governed by the point of view: for all we know is that *she* called him that, just as *he* called her the green lady. Even if resolvable, the two points of view are kept apart to maintain the paradox resulting from the synaesthetic imagery (for, soon enough, their colours turn into tactile qualities which they 'grope').

The apocalyptic 'we parted' follows almost inevitably from the paradox, with a transition from the imagery of colour to imagery of sound. The echoes, now leaving the speaker in the silence of vacancy, turn once again to the re-creation of visual images, bringing to life the meaning of 'twilight', while the theme of

the evening tryst and the struggle of the two lovers to evade the strictures of time and the Larkinian 'death' is developed. The shapes, the shadows, become *through the echoes* the blended colours of the contrasting emotions and the contrasting points of view. The resulting painting becomes itself an echo, reverberating outside time, in the 'fearful silence'.

The greatness of 'Summing Up' may be primarily due to the perfection of the romantic-modernist blend; in other poems the blend is not quite as dextrous and the resulting tone sets the work apart from the typical modernist poem. In 'Nightpiece' the technique and general theme could be easily related to modernism: there is the condensation, the power of the single, sustained metaphor, to channel the resignation, the sense of defeat, the bitterness of helplessnes and even the decidedly anti-romantic 'despair'; but the use of abstractions in the unrealized metaphors and the claustrophobic subjectivity in the portrayal of the mood recall Coleridgian 'Dejection' and the fin-de-Siecle decadent verse so vehemently attacked by the Imagists(38). The text is important because it represents a model often aped by the second generation of New poets, especially recent converts. Here is 'Nightpiece':

When I fluter alone
Inaudibly droning
In my jar of silence;
When I get entangled
In many a mesh
Of night's black web,
Waiting for the flow, or ebb
Of things to come;
I wonder how my burden of time
Could be relieved;
Should I hide in the memory

Of my rosy day of joy?
Should I gather the echoes
From among the silence?
Should I put together
The pieces of memory,
Of blood and water,
Of time drowned,
Of repose in the wisdom of days
Of sorrow blue,
Defeated,
Waiting for the mightier repose of death
Now that no news can reach me?

I have given it in full partly (of course) because it is short, partly because it must be read as a whole, representing as it does a single moment. The grammar helps to keep the particles of the experience together, as it does not in other poems included in this book. Some, like 'On Repetition', deal with ideas embraced because they are felt deeply, thus reviving the metaphysical strain already exploited by Eliot; others, which are predominantly romantic, such as 'Sailing into Memory', 'Fragments of a Common Sad Tale' and 'Verse and Ashes' rely on sensuous imagery, albeit made to fit unconventional moulds; but both categories deviate but little from the 'sound' grammatical structures of Arabic. It is in the dramatic 'Death-in-Between: a Dialogue' and 'Tale of the Sad Minstrel' that Abdul-Saboor uses a variety of grammatical devices in producing his Post-Impressionistic, and occasionally surrealistic, effects. The 'Grand Voice' in 'Death-in-Between' consists entirely of verses from the Quran, that is, 'sacred' prose, and is opposed by the 'humble voice' — the voice of man — which is 'conversational' and inevitably ungrammatical on ocassion. The many voices used in the 'Tale of the Sad Minstrel' also vary their grammar to produce their effect. It is these two poems

which I find most provocative, requiring further study by the Arabist.

(iii)

Though Salah Abdul-Saboor often makes use of 'wit', relying on sarcasm in producing his scathing satires as he does in his 'Tale of the Sad Minstrel', he rarely makes use of irony. He establishes his tone, which is never facetious, early enough in the poem and the reader is never in doubt about his meaning. The successful use of irony is to be found in the work of a man who belongs to Abdul-Saboor's generation but who differs in using the vernacular, commonly described as Egyptian Arabic, and thus has fallen foul of the literary establishment and incurred the displeaure of the official literay historians — Salah Jaheen. A professional cartoonist, a television script-writer, song-writer and poet, Jaheen has never won recognition by the official anthologies of Arabic verse, and suffers from critical neglect on account of his chosen linguistic medium—solely. However, he is undoubtedly one of the outstanding poets in today's Egypt: a whole generation of poets owe to him their poetic idiom, originally drawn by him from the language 'actually spoken by the people' and a lyricism that is unique in Arabic, standard and vernacular alike. It is not because of his 'realism' or lyricism, or, indeed, his vast popular appeal, however, that I regard him as worthy of inclusion in this book; it is, rather, his tone which contrasts so sharply with the high-seriousness of the poets writing in standard Arabic. Alone among the New poets, Jaheen can use irony to produce great effects of poetry, always keeping his tone under control and the theme in focus. Sometimes he produces limericks, sometimes epigrams, but often a new genre which is, for all its reliance on 'wit' or apparent frivolity, truly poetic and rich in 'human' material. The poems chosen represent various facets of his work

which contrasts with Abdul-Saboor's. 'Graves' is fairly representative of his successful use of irony; here is the full text:

How I love graves — tombs so pretty!
A residential suburb
Of peace and quiet,
A beach so blue and breezes bright;
A wondrous sight!

Oh, then, walk and hear your footsteps
Echoing loud to feed your vanity:
There everybody's down
And only you *are* up!
Stop!
The flowers at your feet
Are either dying or dead:
Get your equipment then
And extract a perfume,
The elixir of humility;
Sell it about,
Distribute it and grow rich:
Trample the bones underfoot and philosophize,
Fill up books and be wise!
Your reward is piety and, well,
Many otherworldly gifts;
So read the scriptures there
And say a grand prayer!

So this is the reason
Why the graves I adore;
But a mind like mine,
Profane to the core,
The homes of the living, so fine,
I love a little bit more!

Jaheen wastes no time: as early as the first stanza, the reader can grasp his theme and his tone. Life, celebrated not for anything that happens in it, nor for any specific qualities of the living, is the main theme; and the paradox of the dead being alive sets the tone. Unlike Gray (cf. *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard*) and unlike Wordsworth and Shelley (cf. the *Lucy* poems and *Alastor*) the stress is neither on the dead nor on nature: for Jaheen is not writing an elegy nor does he (though he ironically demands it of the reader) philosophize. The sarcastic adjectives of the firs stanza are used, for the first time perhaps in Arabic literature, to build up a *negative* image: for almost every word unsays what it says—a rhetorical dvice inherited by the modern languages from Latin and revived by Milton for his *Paradise Lost*[39]. But *occupatio*, as this device is termed, is not employed beyond the first stanza. The long 18-line passage maintains the ironic tone not through any specific technical devices but by remoulding the traditional attitude of reverence to the dead, insofar as the speaker *is* alive and must distance himself to an objective enough position, the key words being 'everybody's down / And only you *are* up!' Not until the last stanza, however, with its neat rhyme and rhythm, are we allowed to enjoy the poet's direct 'attack' — again through understatement, which is a potent instrument of the ironic mode.

While, not entirely unknown in ancient Arabic literature, irony — and the refinement of the language of satire in general — must be regarded as essentially modern. An ancient Arabic poet would be typically blunt; he felt no need for subtlety, preferring the frontal attack which often included the use of foul language (cf. the satires of Abu Tammaam, or indeed, al-Mutanabbi himself). In modern times, the ironic mode may be traced back to the pre-revivalist era when the famous wits of Cairo *(az-Zurafaa)* produced much witty verse which was either excluded from the 'serious' anthologies or relegated to obscure corners in their

'works'. A revivalist poet, Hafiz Ibrahim is known to have tried his hand at the genre, as did many others now regarded as marginal on account of their excessive use of 'wit' (such as Abdul-Hamid al-Deeb). With the revival of irony in the West, primarily in Pound and Eliot, the entire scene of English poetry seemed to change: irony became a *poetic* tool used not only in satire but also in transmitting poetic themes impossible to put across in the traditional idiom of the romantics. The translation of much foreign, mainly English and French verse into Arabic secured a measure of 'respect' for this mode; but the genre remained suspect. Arabic poets approached it rather shyly, preferring direct satires. The exceptions are, therefore, important; and Salah Jaheen is joined in this area by another poet, better known for his dramatic career as actor-director-playwright, particularly for the introduction of an almost new literary genre—verse drama in the vernacular—Nageeb Soroor.

The extract I have included in this book comes from a very long poem in which he pillories the literati whose names are associated with a certain Cairene cafe (Cafe Riche) and known to advocate social realism. In it he builds up a little dramatic scene where the speakers represent various aspects of their activity, shown to be anything but *activity*, and the title of the original 'Protocols of the Elders of Riche' is obviously a parody on the well known 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion'. Insofar as he does not offer any *protocols* but *decrees,* the title has been modified accordingly.

Though mainly distinguished *as a poet* by his tone, Negeeb Soroor represents a continuation of the line introduced and perfected by Abdul-Saboor, particularly regarding principles of form and imagery. One of the unfortunate consequences of this line, this type of poetic technique, is the freedom it accords the poet in building up his images and the far too complex metaphors

he finds pleasure in constructing. Perhaps more metaphoric than other living languages[40], modern Arabic allows for far-fetched images to be accepted without questioning, and from the 'metaphoric idioms' of classical Arabic[41] new metaphors are generated which may or may not relate to ancient use. The New poetry has therefore been a scene for the oddest possible images, for extravagant expression and shocking combinations of words. Many young poets in Egypt find it easy to ape the masters of the New 'school' without being accused of incomprehensibility. And this is most obvious in the work of those 'aspirants' who, without adequate training, linguistic, artistic or otherwise, produce poems which rely almost entirely on bizzare imagery which they could not have experienced emotionally or intellectually.

One of these is Ali Qandeel who died a few years ago in a car accident. His untimely death was, of course, a disaster and he, by any standard, had promise. His work, posthumously published and hailed as metaphysical in a new key, is the epitome of modern unintelligibility which derives from the power of the single image to blur, deliberately or not, the 'contours' of both feeling and idea. His major poem, which gives his only volume of verse its title, is 'The Rising Beings'. Sympathetically approached it may sound very modern, bordering on the 'metaphysical' and the profundity of thought expected of a great poet; but to the ears of the layman the poem will be at best 'difficult'. It is, again, very long, with no apparent links between the parts, no logical transitions or (naturally) a story line. I have therefore chosen only those parts which appeared coherent enough for my English translation.

It has been argued that this line could be related in its own obscure way to 'Symbolism', the true progenitor of Modernism; but how can we defend an image like the following one which 'in-

augurates' the first volume of verse of Mujahid Abdul-Mun'im Mujahid:

My path was strewn,
O Spring of my love,
With your greenish eyes
That drank up the life of Cairo
Its noise and happiness!

This is not just bad; it is absurd, and the fashion has not died out. Some of the verse recently published in the current Egyptian weekly *al-Qahirah* (Cairo) is often a development of this tendency, albeit carried to an extreme of utter insipidity:

A Martial Fantasy:

A window between the hoofs of a moon
Stretching on the cushions of night lust,
Gathering a shadow on a scarred wall,
Baring a wind, carrying a cracked sword,
A cracked shield,
A head inhabited by horses
Exercising between pasture and fire(42)

The perpetrator of this is one Isam Abu Zayd, a 16 year old, strangely hailed as a talent of the future. But it is hardly Abdul-Saboor's fault that the rising generation writes in this manner; the disease could be traced as far back as the early 1960's when it took the form of a revolt against the all too logical imagery of the tradition.

(iv)

Having established the main variations of the modernist impulse in the New poetry, namely the romantic undercurrent in Abdul-Saboor, the ironic tone of Jaheen, the sarcasm of Soroor

and the Surrealism of Qandeel, we may now advance to the Neo-romanticism of Farooq Shoosha, Muhammad Ibrahim Abu-Sinnah and Farooq Guwaida. They are grouped together, for all their individual differences, because they share the same poetic faith—a basic hope in man's ability to overcome his predicament through the recognition of *truth*, the power of *feeling* and the belief in the *past;* and I have called it Neo-romanticism because the movement represents a revival of the European romantic spirit which had informed the work of the Apollo Group in the 1930's — Ali Mahmoud Taha, Ibrahim Nagui and Abu-Shadi. However Modernist the poems may appear, especially in idiom and structure, the main emotions and ideas are romantic: they are easier to relate to Shelley and Byron than to Auden and Eliot or, indeed, to Gunn and Hughes. Shoosha's imagery is not too abstract; but his ideas are; and his generalizations reveal an interest in the universal standards (of truth, sincerity etc.) which Wordsworth had inherited from the eighteenth century. Abu-Sinnah shares the seminal preference for abstractions, but he decidedly has the ability to focus on particular, concrete situations, elevated or idealized (or so he would have us believe) through generalization. Guwaida is equally interested in idealization and his work is dominated by the lyrical emotions of romanticism. A brief examination of their imagery may help to illustrate their differences.

Shoosha's name has been associated with the traditional Arabic aesthetic. His radio programme, 'Our Beautiful Language', has served to introduce the audience to the beauties of expression in classical Arabic; his anthologies of poems on love and mysticism (chosen mainly from the classics), and his television programme on 'Cultural Issues' have shown him to be a man of exceptionally refined taste and sound judgment. But he is a poet, first and foremost. His *Complete Works* has recently been published (1985), and the poems therein present us with an image of a poet

who cares about his vocation more in Tennysonian than in Eliotic terms. The form he seems to favour is the longer poem where the mood is sustained through the musical technique of theme and variation. He has a favourite persona, too—a man disgusted by social ills and the road humanity has taken of late to the point of rejecting the entire modern age. He begins one of his poems with the typical:

About to fall in labyrinthine words,
In abysmal sorrow,
So vast, in deserts of the spirit,
I drift, am carried along
By a stupendous stream of our age's excrement;
I am pulled up by the roots,
Thrown in the face of time,
A trembling shadow, defeated,
Cold-whispered and — stabbed,
Defeated, exhausted and thoroughly crushed
In the embittered night.

The Shelleyan imagery may be necessary for the vehement passion, but the balance between emotion and image is not always maintained in Shoosha's work; and, insofar as the preponderance of either could lead to vagueness or to sentimentality (as Eliot has observed)(43), we are rarely far from either extreme in him. He scales greater heights, to be sure, when he attempts one of the established genres (one of the poems chosen for this book is an elegy), and he has the ability to evoke mysterious worlds through the manipulation of highly evocative words. The peculiar charm of his verse is in effect due to this very quality: you are often carried along by the passion, especially as the sequence of the imagery creates a sense of urgency which is in itself an integral part of his metaphoric framework. This point will be clearer, perhaps, if we have a look at the elegy chosen for this book,

which turns in the hands of Shoosha into a unique, magnificent love-song. At certain points in the poem the verse mellows and the grief turns into a poetic vision of today's world: the incantations of the opening turn in the last two parts into an original lament on the death of real feeling in this age. Here are the opening lines:

Was he a painter
Drenching in colour
The face of sad times?
Did he use for his oils
The heavy and weary hours
Until black merged
Into white and white merged
Into black, together projected
In forms and shapes uncouth?
Did he opt in the end to leave
In search of a prophecy
That played in the eyes
Of the day-crowned young?
Was it a prophecy of children
Yet to be born —
Who would perforce be born — at dawn,
Not night-orphans but a real breed of men
To foster his dream and unfold his tale —
The story bizzare
Of how he wore a cloak of grandeur
And destroyed his painting kit
When his colours could not
Blot out the sorrow of the land
Or overpaint the blackness
Wherein human clay
In darkness lay?

The sustained painting imagery functions at two levels. The first is fairly obvious: man is continually trying to re-make the world through art, though reality consistently defeats his best attempts, and he inevitably surrenders in despair — a Modernist elegiac theme. The second is less obvious, perhaps, for painting itself becomes symbolic of man's perception and the paradox is that any man capable of real perception will be, according to the poet, eager to change what he sees but, naturally, helpless to do so. Therein lies the tragedy: the 'surfaces' betray an inward distortion, and one must reach for the distortion if the surfaces are to be interpreted correctly. Digging deep in search of a meaning — for the typical romantic poet must search for a meaning — the artist will find that nothing could have a meaning beyond the human heart. Hence the note of hope struck in the concluding part; it is a consolation similar to that of the concluding lines of Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode', though in Shoosha it takes the form of a persistent dream which recalls the typical Shelleyan dream:

> I dream of a beach
> Where the strand still bears
> The footprints of a couple merged into one,
> A couple of words in a verse!

Like Shoosha, Abu Sinnah prefers the longer poem which, however, rarely exceeds a hundred lines. He differs, almost drastically, in his preference for the 'localized poem' in much the same way as a short story writer or a playwright prefers to have a definite spot for his action. He shares with Abdul-Saboor and the first generation the bitterness engendered by the 1967 defeat (in the third Arab-Israeli war) but rather than rely on the power of the rhythm and imagery as Shoosha does, he likes to re-enact the bitterness in verse. The title poem in an early volume (1969) sums up the meaning of defeat for him. It concludes with the lines:

O Spring! if you happen to cross our path,
If your beautiful blue eyes
Glance through our tenements,
Give us a greeting of peace —
Leave it at our doorstep.
Should you want to reprimand us,
You'll get merely shy excuses;
For we sit here, crippled,
With no shadows
On the black dreary walls.
We may miss the colours and the light
But, waiting for the departed to come back,
We still sit, impotent,
In the winter garden.

The defeat was essentially an occasion for soul-searching, for examining our position as a nation made to suffer, perhaps undeservedly, as a result of circumstances beyond our control. The paradox was that every Egyptian felt the predicament in larger proportions and with more intensity than expected because of the traditional sense of inner strength he has. Individuals felt betrayed by a leadership that claimed to be closer to them than any of their previous rulers — a leadership that had awakened in them a sense of national pride and made them expect a better fate. This accounts for the feeling the poet has of being a 'cripple', and for that strange sense of impotence. The success of the poem is due, I believe, to the fact that Abu Sinnah manages to transfer the external forces which he felt had let him down to nature. The social scene becomes a winter garden with a vague hope of the spring returning. The recurrence of the word 'perhaps' is central to the meaning of the poem: it is neither a poem of hope nor a poem of despair. It is one in which a sensitive

mind wonders, Shelley-like, whether spring will come at all, even when he is certain that it must.

Writing on the second generation of New poets, Professor Lewis Awad has singled out Abu Sinnah for detailed discussion, focussing on the 1967 defeat as responsible for the line of development taken by the whole generation[44]. While the importance of the defeat cannot be overemphasized, most poets of the second generation seem to have beaten away its ghosts, especially as the 1970's gave them different things to worry about. So when ten years later (in 1979) Abu Sinnah published his *Meditations on Petrified Cities,* the earlier perplexity, the frustration and the sense of loss which followed from the defeat finally disappeared. In its place a confident poet makes heard a romantic voice crying over the future of his own city, Cairo. True, the idiom tends to be modernist here and there, but the sentiment is purely romantic. The melancholic strain is reminiscent of the wistfulness of Hijazi's *A Heartless City* and Abdul-Saboor's early *People in My Country,* but it derives essentially from Shelley: for the poet has a hope for Cairo, and for every "petrified city", every human community deprived of the essential human passions of love and kindness.[45]. From that collection I have included here 'Bloody Sights in an Indifferent city'.

The inveterate hope Shared by shoosha and Abu Sinna is based on a belief in the original goodness of man. In poem after poem of the mature Abu Sinnah, this hope produces images of man battling against ills that are not irremediable: love emerges as the master passion, and seems to hold the key to salvation.

The main problem with the 'emotionalism' of the New poets is that it sometimes occludes our vision of truly modernist qualities in them[46], as it often does in the poetry of the no less prolific, and more popular, Farooq Guwaida. He has been described

as the romantic poet par excellence, and has been attacked by the 'New Critics' as lacking in depth, and by the traditionalists for adopting the new verse; but he weathered the storm and proceeded to write a verse drama, *A Vizier in Love,* using a combination of traditional and new verse (which met, however, with further objections), and he has recently turned his hand to traditional verse with reasonable success. Though excluded from Awad's 1979 list of second generation Egyptian poets(47) — Perhaps because he had only few volumes of verse to his credit— Guwaida is most popular today both in Egypt and the Arab world at large. His sudden flowering of talent surprised many critics who were reluctant to alter their 'official' list of new poets; it also meant his isolation from the New verse school which had its roots, as I have shown, in the 1960's and embraced socialism as a creed. The youngest of the 'group', he never really belonged to it or recognized its 'supremacy'; but, deny as he might, his poetry does belong to the main line of neo-romanticism and the poems I have translated amply illustrate this.

Consider his treatment of the 'city' theme in 'The Heart I had'. Apparently a true Wordsworthian, Guwaida manages to tanscend the traditional approach and infuse an individual feeling of loneliness in the poem, easier to relate to modernist *alienation* than to romantic solitude. He also resorts to syntactic tricks in image-making, and I have done my best to reflect his Arabic syntax in English, though Arabic, like Latin, is an inflected language where syntax plays hardly any role at all in influencing the meaning. With poetry, however, meaning is never confined to 'prose ense' and, if a poet can make use of the fluidity of syntax which Arabic affords no less than English(48) he can secure a measure of the 'enhancing suggestions' noted by Ricks in Milton(49). We need go no further than the opening stanza of that poem to realize this:

Shaken by the breath of a winter sky
And clouds of smoke, stifling, awry,
Frightened, I flinch from Time — a phantom!

The grammar tells us that it was the poet who was both shaken and frightened; but look at the sequence: clouds of smoke, stifling, awry, frightened! The suggestion is made that the clouds could themselves be frightened, and the alternation of past and present participles suggests an interaction in the city between the stifled and the stifling: the clouds have been reduced to smoke, and can be seen as victims of the city. Like the poet's, their identity is in jeopardy. And consider the second stanza:

How Time speeds on
And life stands still
Puzzles my will
A day of pain gone
Another of despondency

The Shakespearean echo functions in both directions: though the 'normal' subject of 'puzzles' is in the previous two lines, another subject may be seen in the following two. The trick is not deliberate, I believe, insofar as the poet employs an impressionistic technique quite common in modernist poetry. The third stanza, for instance, has no finite verb at all:

Oh for a moment of time's uncharted sea,
A pre-wedding day of my city,
The odour of her innocence in the air,
Her master light, so bright,
Shining on the river, shy and diffident.
So different.

Are we not entitled to ask what was it that was shy, diffident and different? The light, the river or the city? The epithets may

apply to all three, and they may in effect be applicable to other things in the stanza — the moment of Time's 'uncharted sea', the joy, the odour or the innocence. It is a stanza of identification, of synaesthetic imagery, that is, of images which correspond internally by cross-referring to one another and by applying to a central entity — the city.

Guwaida also uses structural tricks in establishing his unity of theme and impression. The theme of 'stifling' for instance is repeated with variation throughout to create a central paradox of life and death. So in stanza 4 the image reappears in terms of 'choking', of breathing suspended to unleash a voice within or a visionary voice from the past. This is further developed until in the end it is resolved in the poet's inability to talk at all.

'Waiting for the Train' is a similar poem where the romantic impulse creates a 'romantic' *atmosphere,* to use Coleridge's term(50), which helps to transfer the physical incident to a mental plane, so that the whole experience may be read as an abstraction, a state of mind. In his later work this peculiar brand of romanticism gives birth to an original tone which makes Guwaida stand alone among his contemporaries. Though he tends to prefer the longer poem nowadays, like Shoosha and Abu Sinna, this tone distinguishes him from them. In the book I give examples of his early and later work, and hope to keep up with the development of this fast maturing poet.

(v)

There are other varieties of neo-romanticism which could be related to Abdul-Saboor's version of the modernist-romantic poem, such as the use of incidents or characters from Arab history in seeking fresh interpretations of the present. Sometimes allegory is used, sometimes parables; but the 'norm' is the 'pro-

jection' of the past onto the present in the attempt to get *a message* across. Just as Abdul-Saboor used in his 'Tale of the Sad Minstrel' the traditional image of the Arab Court poet to declare his condemnation of the military establishment responsible for the Arab defeat in 1967, Amal Donqol uses 'tales', incidents and characters from Arab history in declaring his rejection of the political line adopted in the 1970's, culminating as it did in the Egyptian peace accord with Israel. With such a political message, he was easily popular, especially because of the 'personal legend' he created for himself[51]. Like Shoosha and Ahmad Suwailam, Donqol relies heavily on the ability of the original combinations of Arabic words to evoke rhythms of ancient Arabic poetry; his verse is very pleasing to hear but it suffers most in translation.

A typical poem is 'Crying before Zarqa al-Yamama'. Zarqa was a sharp-eyed girl traditionally noted for sighting the advance of an invading army which held up tree branches for camouflage, and is therefore used as symbolic of the vatic powers of the poet. As nobody in al-Yamama, a region in Arabia (and a tribe), heeded her warning, so Donqol would claim that a poet's oracular utterances might fall on deaf ears — in this case Donqol himself warning the rulers of the land. Like Abdul-Saboor's, the poem condemns those responsible for the defeat, but it differs in making a specific accusation. For Donqol objects in no ambiguous terms to sacrificing the 'common man', the speaker being such a character, in the war with Israel. Being poor, never a master of his fate and consistently exploited by those at the top, the speaker thus addresses Zarqa:

O sacred prophetess!
Break your silence!
You have been silent year after year,
To ensure my safety.
'Shut up', they said,

And I was quiet and blind,
Acquiescing in a leadership of eunuchs!
I stayed behind, among the slaves of my tribe
To guard our flocks,
To shear the wool,
To keep the she-camels in the fold,
Myself asleep in the fold of oblivion,
My food: a crust of bread and water
And some dried dates.
And here I am,
In the thick of fighting, called up,
When the swordsmen, the archers and the knights
Had flinched!
I, who never ate mutton,
Never had power,
Was of no consequence,
Banished from the councils of aldermen,
Now invited to die
Though not to parley with the men!

In the circles of the literati (and such circles do exist in Egypt, though more importantly in Syria and Iraq) Donqol is regarded as a great poet mainly on account of his rejection of peace with Israel. His topicality has, however, its dangers, and a good poem like 'Make no peace!'(52) could fall flat on someone who may want peace. Living a life which he wanted to appear as similar as possible to that of the 'vagrant' Arab poets of the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., he succeeded in creating a new image of the 'pauper-poet' — a man with a message, who cares little about the temptations of public life or glory but who would die for a cause. In this book I have included three poems from his first three volumes *Moon Murder, Crying Before Zarqa al-Yamama* and *A Comment on Current Events* (one from each). His fourth volume *Future Testament* relies heavily on Biblical images and

uses too many Biblical symbols, all employed to serve his main political purposes.

Another variety is the allegorical poem which is sometimes given the flesh and blood of realistic action, sometimes presented as a parable. Mrs. Wafaa Wagdy has excelled in this and, as a faithful disciple of Abdul-Saboor, has inherited the modernist-romantic blend, though the rmanticism often outweighs the modernism. Her peculiar achievement is to be found, however, in a genre she seems to develop almost independently: the short allegorical (or symbolic) poem. Her 'Blood Wedding' is a good example of this. It was directly inspired by the 1967 defeat when the Arab celebration of a would-be victory turned into a stunning catastrophe. She does not, however, refer to that political 'occasion' at all, nor does she suggest that her poem has any wider significance, social or psychological. The common Egyptian practice of firing shots (ususally from a shotgun) at a wedding as an expression of joy is usually condemned as it sometimes results in casualties among the guests—and Wafaa Wagdy uses this allegorically, making the victim this time the bride herself, so that she can be easily identified with an abstraction such as national pride or dignity or even with Egypt herself. 'Two Rumour Poems' may be seen to belong to the same genre but are superior in not being so topical. From her first volume of verse I have included 'A Vision of the Wound', which is original in its handling of the theme of dying love, particularly in its reversed symbolism. The speaker assumes a position of a woman who can, through her intrinsic creative power, regenerate the heart of a man who apparently had ceased to harbour the old affection for her. Mrs. Wagdy can become exceptionally lyrical when she sings the beauty of a faithful relationship as she does in 'Seven-Day Sonata'.

The allegorical (or symbolic) line is always fraught with the danger of obscurity and, while Mrs Wagdy is consistently lucid,

others are not. Muhammad Afifi Matar has experiments in it which relate him to the popular tradition, full as it is with elements of the 'absurd'(53). Matar's use of the 'absurd' connects him not with the 'folk' tradition, strictly defined, but with the 'literary' use of the absurd in *Kuntspoesie* from William Blake to Ted Hughes. The poem I have chosen illustrates his use of animal symbolism in capturing the inscrutable sense of release that accompanies every 'genuine' love experience — the mysterious freedom engendered by the unity of man and woman. The colt is both a 'baby' horse and a wild spirit; and the pristine freedom is almost pagan, with the images creating an enigmatic, almost surrealistic atmosphere wich deepens the sense of mystery.

Critics have been attracted to the implication that the colt represents a spirit of anarhy which, even if celebrated in itself, disrupts the free-flowing stream of ordinary life. This possible 'philosophical' implication often appears to give 'profundity' to the verse; but the poem is original and novel enough to require no aid from 'philosophy'.

Sometimes the poets themselves invite a 'philosopical' approach, especially that the New poets, fascinated by the apparent 'depth' of Modernist verse, use the jargon of the philosophers without fully realizing their significance. Like the 'surrealist' image, this tendency is to be found most in the young who 'imitate' the translated verses they read in the current magazines; but even the 'elders' do so on occasion. Not so Ahmad Suwailam who is represented by a poem that is profound without being 'philosophical'. 'Holes' is a straightforward poem although it deals with the 'neo-metaphysical' theme of subject-object relationship.

Suwailam employs a central metaphor, namely that man's senses (metaphorically seen as chinks in his armour) make him vulnerable to intrusion by external reality, in building up a di-

alectic between subject and object where both thesis and antithesis are valid. The poem is therefore based on paradox—ultimately the idea that man's 'weakness', his being open to external influences, could prove to be his strength. The 'holes' are therefore to be read both in terms of Coleridge's 'coalescence of subject and object' and within the general framework of Wordsworth's mind-world dialectic[54].

Variations of the romantic imulse may be found which have little or nothing to do with the 1967 defeat which seems to preoccupy a whole generation. Indeed, there are individual voices which owe little to Abdul-Saboor or to the New poetry as an artistic trend: some proceed directly from the Tradition, having absorbed the Modernist trend, and so escape Abdul-Saboor's influence altogether, such as Sa'd Darweesh, Ahmad Haykal and Malak Abdul-Aziz. Others have been original enough to stand outside the mainstream of the New poetry, even if they share the sensibility of the second generation, such as Fathi Said and Nassar Abdullah. There are even those whose intellectual background connects them directly with the European romanticism of the mid-nineteenth century, and, in the case of Izz El-Din Ismail, with the Modernism of the early twentieth.

Ismail is a special case, for while his spirit is modernist, his idiom is romantic — an Abdul-Saboor in reverse. I have often thought that he, a man of vast knowledge, must be using the romantic idiom deliberately to establish a familiar framework (for the romantic-trained Arab reader) for his 'unfamiliar' modernist vision. Consider his 'Voyage': the title and opening stanza are drenched in the idiom of every true romantic, and Shelley is immediately recalled; but you discover soon enough that the speaker is a persona like those of *The Waste Land,* and the point is brought home in the key stanza:

The candle lit on the road
Saw a procession of phantoms,
Both men and women passed by —
But not a single brow shone
No tears dimmed an eye!
When I called on them, 'You there!
'Have you not seen my lamp gleaming,
'The oil within, light from my eyes, burning?'

which recalls the famous scene in Eliot—the crowd fllowing over the bridge and a character declaring 'there I saw one I knew' — though the walking dead are already phantoms in Ismail. The real affinities are with Tennyson's *Ulysses,* though, again, the theme is modified to suggest a journey more spiritual than physical, as the last stanza makes clear. The actual voice of the poet commenting on his character's departure has the same function as that of Eliot's commentary, but it is even more advanced in that it makes us aware that the persona does not belong to our age, that his 'sentimentality' conceals an idealism which is sorely missed in today's world and that, whether you accept it not, it must be seen as representing a fast vanishing human stance.

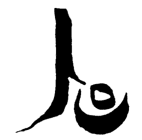
The use of personae in Ismail may be confusing. It has prevented many critics from grasping the real character of his verse, but it is to be related to his dramatic bent of mind, and his passion for varying his style, drawing on the indefatigable resources of Arabic, to embody various moods of contemporary man. As he has shown in *The Trial of an Unknown Man*, Ismail is at his best when he uses *style* as an instrument of characterization — a unique privilege, thanks to his expert knowledge of Arabic[55].

The poems representing Fathi Said reveal a dominant romantic impulse which is decidedly behind the image he created for the

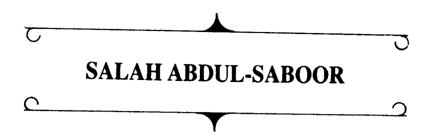
poet in his famous volume *But not Poetry, My Lord!* The two poems chosen for this volume are merely introductory, as the poet has many voices and shares with Ismail (as with Guwaida, Suwailam, Abu Sinnah and Wagdy) the interest in drama.

Of the rest of the poets represented in this first volume little need be said: their poems speak for themselves. Their romanticism often comes to the surface and is often thinly disguised by the New verse form. Nassar Abdullah uses deceptively modernist idiom, drawing on apparently 'metaphysical' ideas, but is plainly romantic: his subjectivity is hardly disguised by his 'objective' images and his firm faith in man's heart never suffers from the melancholic strain which pervades his work. Though different, in using the 'received' (if not exactly 'standard') images of the romantics, Ahmad Heykal's verse makes no bones to declare the same firm faith; he delights in C. Day-Lewis's 'consecrated images' and often resorts to them in declaring his anti-modernist optimism. Heykal tried his hand at the New poetry, he tells us in his introduction to his only volume of verse *Echoes of the Flute*, when it was in vogue[56]; but, essentially, he is a traditionalist. Images of nature are common to both modernists and romanticists, of course, but it is what you make of them that gives the verse its peculiar romantic flavour; and Malak Abdul-Aziz is no exception. In her tribute to Taha Hussein, 'The Mountain', she reveals a deep-seated romantic bent of mind. She is almost consistently free of the affected myth-making that characterizes much of the New poetry, and she differs from the rising generation in insisting on the 'pure' image, that is, the image as an emotional-intellectual amalgam untainted by allusion to pagan or Christian mythology. Not so Maxime Farag Maxime, however, who freely uses Christian images which are not fully realized. The use of the 'cross', crucifixion, the theme of Judas etc. was so common in the New poetry at one time that poets could not be

blamed for accepting them as part of the poetic idiom of the New verse. The tendency is fast dying out, at any rate, and if traces of it are to be found, they are in the main genuine.



Arabic Poetry
in Egypt



SALAH ABDUL-SABOOR

Tale of the Sad Minstrel☆

I. That Evening

You spoke to me
Of winged horse-shoes
Sparking all round,
Flashing, igniting
The golden crescents
Of city minarets;
You spoke to me
Of a bunch of swords hard,
Stuck in a rock so stark,
To be drawn only on a spell:

☆ A sequence from an earlier volume, namely, **Meditations on a Wounded Time**, where the effect of the 1967 military defeat is most apparent. Cf - 'Introduction'.

Namely, the names, the charmed names of
your bunch,
How great, how formidable,
How good, how nice, how sweet — unconquerable!

'O minstrel', you ordered, 'Sing us a song
'(But keep your eyes down
'In our presence)
'Sing us a lay
'To tickle our pride
'In the victory of the side,
'And when the appointed hour comes
'(An hour unveiled
'By a cloud dispelled)
'We'll drink up the dregs
'When the devil's helmet begs
'To be a goblet bright
'For the wine of superior knight'.

II. A digression

(For which please accept apologies)

It's my job, my lords, to sing!
I hug my lyre, all right,
But then my heart,
Pierced with arrows five
Is my secret treasure,

My real measure,
Both orchard and grave.
That's where I plant my corpses dear,
Taken in times of fear
And buried in a bosom abysmal.
It's to it that repair
In my solitary raptures
When on occasion I dare
Face the evening
Without my regular provision
Of hash and women!
I unshroud them,
Stand them up
Or stretch them across,
Drive away sleep,
Peer into their diamond dumb eyes,
Then run away for wine and tears.

An account of the corpses must be giv'n:
One belongs to a poor and hungry child
Which I had buried in time
So remote and obscure;
I cried as I did so,
I cried, was broken, dissipated,
I cried, was duly truncated, and,
Cloud-like, thinned out, dissolved,
And must have disappeared.

O pity, pity, my lordly knights!
For all of a sudden
Two heads have grown
On both shoulders:
One had eyes bright
That peered ahead,
The other had lidless eyes
With an eyeball
Coiling in his nape
Like a snake.
My aplogies, I have to be brief,
For the corpses, so many,
Buried year after year, so many,
Must go to sleep.

'I offer you drink and opium,
'To doze off peacefully, good souls,
'I offer you tears and groans,
'My dear dead!'

What have you now to say
What noises could you make
O tortured dead?

You there! Didn't I bury you
A year ago?
Strange corpse!
You came to life

In the beginning
So rough and coarse,
So monstrously disfigured:
You had long shanks but no knees,
With a wide mouth, spreading
As if a faint smile
Stuck, weed-like,
Round your jaws!
O body of the old clown, sleep!
O child, in whose garments
I lived for years, sleep!
Lie on your bed of dust
And munch your solitary crust!
And you, whose eye-balls are so glazed,
Whose lips drop forth words
White and briny — poisoned froth.
And you, didn't I bury you yesterday?
(It was an old, wise greyhead
Who found himself dead
When required to draw on wisdom
The wrong way round;
His head actually rolled on
From leg to abdomen
Back into position
But fearful and rotten).

Sleep, my friend,

Bear up your torment
And adjust their wisdom
To your old garment.

III. Another Short Digression
(which may prove useful)

My position, my lords, I take
At the end of the corridor;
We are, all in all, four:
The court jester,
The official historian,
The sooth-sayer,
And the minstrel.
We have neither names nor swords
And all are hirelings.
The gilded robes we wear
Are borrowed from the Sultan's wardrobe
With whom we have a vast friendship
Deep and vast like an abyss!

IV. Going back to that evening

Assembled were you all
My lords, that evening!
O how great and good,
How high and mighty!
The pearls of our city,

The stars of our sky!
Marching in court, singly,
You outshone yourselves in splendour,
Trooping together,
The glory of your heads
Lent light to one another
Rather than melting together!
(And this, I must say, is
Truth unembellished).

Great God! how wonderful you are,
How gentle, how noble,
How grave, how brave,
What cleverness, what nerve,
In riding, charioting, galloping, jostling,
In the laying of an ambush,
In making a conquest,
In reconstruction, destruction,
Inking pages, thinking wages,
Inking, thinking, blinking,
Experimenting, dementing,
Training, straining,
In music and verse and singing,
Womanizing, buying, selling, renting,
In science, technology,
Morphology, phonology,
In short —

You're the gift of heaven
To mortal earth,
A handful of mortals,
A proof that God
Can create the ideal
In the shape of a mortal!
Can it be so odd
That God
Should squeeze all excellence into one,
Rather, into a dozen?
(Truth unembellished, let me swear
By the dead who scratch
Under my skin).

That evening I was sad
And was tired, that evening;
Perhaps you do not know
What sorrow means, my knightly lords.
(It is not, whatever it is,
Your kind of sadness).
Mine is a sorrow that can't be
Quenched with wine or water
Nor can it be dispelled by prayer,
It is a death-bound caravan
Moving in deserts wide,
Ghost-driven in lands wild,
Dogged by regret;

But the call of a trumpet
Summons me to take over, to
Drive it along
To the caverns of oblivion
In a world of unbeing.
It is I then
Who drives the death-bound caravan
To resurrection
Out of sepulchral caves
Scaling sun beams
To a preordained morrow.

Imponderable is my sorrow,
Imperishable.

'O minstrel', you ordered, 'sing us a song',
'Keeping your eyes down
'In our presence
'Sing us a lay
'To tickle our pride
'In the victory of the side
'And when the appointed hour comes
'(An hour unveiled
'By a cloud dispelled)
'We'll drink up the dregs
'When the devil's helmet begs
'To be a goblet bright
'For the wine of superior knight':

Well, I did sing a song;
But the refrain
Betrayed my ill-disguised pain!
One of you, perhaps the guard-barman
(He walked about with extended hand)
Whispered in my ear
In such raucous tones:
Shall I tell you the secret?
Shall I tell you the secret?

Whenever I recall the event, my glorious lords,
The dead begin to quiver
Within my broken heart,
My sharp - edged bones would dart
Up from my shanks to prick my throat,
And fear would soar in the gaping
Space within my drained eyes.
Did I ask a question then?
I must have done,
For an answer came along.
It must have been,
To judge by the man's doubled figure,
Doubled or doubling, but babbling, blabbering:

Your tunes have betrayed you
Minstrel boy!
(I am nearly fifty,
and, mark my word,

it might start
a good friendship)
In your mysterious voice
A broken tune is audible,
Suspicious, ill-purposed,
As though an ironic doubt
Like a bloated body, floats
And sinks in the abyss
Of your scarred uvula.

Soon I was dismissed
From the palace, my noble knights,
Turned into a hopeless vagabond,
Hungry and humiliated.

Eventually the steeds of the devil's company
Arrived: you went, all out,
Winged ostriches. Alas! with bastard hearts.

V. A Belated Confession

The truth is, knights proud,
I felt you were
The real shroud,
And that was why
I was sad.

On Repetition

The night.
The night repeats itself,
And repeats itself.
And the morning
Repeats itself;
And the dreams, the footsteps
The fall of darkness
The fall of loneliness, with the dark
In a disconsolate heart,
The tremour of veins, cold and hot,
The flutter of banners,
Of victor and vanquished;
The tales of killer and the killed,
A joke of jesters,

A jest of jokers,
Street noises
And funerals.
Even the boredom of repetition
Repeats itself.

(Such a strange city, as this one,
Has multiplied over the years;
Its days repeated; has stocked
Under repeated flesh and skin
Nine million repeated souls)

Some cities defy repetition;
They do their best to make cities
Out of dreams, or history,
Spun out of illusions, or monuments,
Tales told by the statues,
Or utopian cities drawn up by the pens
Of absurdity
Cities reflected in the cave
Of God's mirrors
Shadow without substance.

Some of the repeated
Oppose repetition.

Some of the repeated
Turn into figures,
Inscriptions on a wall,
Or carvings in rock,
But the wind, the sun and the rain
Already doom them to repetition.

Some of the repeated turn into voices,
Tunes or verses;
But the roar of whirling time
Swallows up the flute and the flute-player.
Some of the repeated
Turn into trumpets and drums,
But the dailies, and the annals of history,
Only print what's to be forgotten by history.

Do not sail against fate.
Of your own free will
Fall into repetition.

Death in Between: A Dialogue[☆]

A Grand Voice:

By the beaming forenoon
And the brooding night,
Thy Lord has not forsaken thee,
Has not abandoned thee,
What comes later shall be better than the present,
Thy Lord shall give thee
And thou shalt be satisfied.

A humble voice:

Where?
What have you given me, O Lord of all being?

☆ The 'Grand Voice' consists entirely of verses from the Quran.

Here I am, stumbling between the gates
Of present and future,
Fall in the gap in between.
You did extend a generous hand,
You did once offer me a cup,
My lips were wet with the wine of paradise,
Sweet basil grew on my shoulders,
But it was suddenly held back!
O Lord! Shield me from the scorching heat
Of a burning heart, deserted,
Of eyes hot and sore, bewildered.
In boredom I twist and turn,
A dagger of listlessness,
Every morning,
Pierces my heart,
Both edges poisoned!
Where are your presents?
Where is your gold-beaked angel?

(He visited me, when the charmed night was out
And, in pain akin to pleasure,
O Lord! he took me away
From the fellow bacchanals of the local senate,
Lifted me, so weak in body,
With a soul drained out,
Carried me so high about,
Only to drop me in a dungeon horrible)

Depressed, with both sides shivering,
I stayed and stayed,
Thought I had been thrown away into oblivion,
But soon was crushed under your weight of light.

I cannot talk about it, my Lord!
A secret sealing two hearts;
So, when you leave before cockcrow,
Your words leave behind a few echoes in my ears,
And your light leaves behind
A gleam—
A broken beam
In both eyes.

A Grand Voice:

And He taught Adam the names, all of them,
Then he presented them unto the angels
And said:
Now tell Me the names of these
If you speak truly.
They said:
Glory be to Thee! We know not
Save what Thou hast taught us!
Surely Thou art the all-knowing, the all-wise.
He said:
Adam, tell them their names...

A Humble voice:

Oh, no!
I daren't my Lord!
How could I name all the names?
Do you, my Lord, hate me so much as to blow
Into the hollow reed of my lean body
The names that you for long had preserved?
Relieve me of this task,
O most bounteous!
Oh, find another cup
To fill up
In your generosity!
For I, for long, since the sun of your eyes
Abandoned me
Since I got used to the shadows so elusive,
Have sometimes hidden myself under
the wall of metaphor,
In the hole of euphemism,
The crevices of obliquity.
I'm alive, though I do not live,
But rather
Scatter my parts every morning,
And gather them every evening;
I feel them, count them,
And feel grateful to my bilious wisdom
For having survived to this day —

And then my head is sealed:
I sleep, or faint.

What would you have me do, my Lord?
Should I call evil by its name?
Should I call coercion by its name?
Would you have me call by their real names
Iniquity, the flattering of power, tyranny,
Malice, poverty of spirit, lies of the heart,
Tricks of logic, torture, cruelty justified,
Mental cheapness deified,
Words spurious and reports falsified?

No, my Lord!
I cannot, my Lord!
I cannot, my Lord!

A Grand Voice:

Go thou forth hence, thou art accursed!
Go thou forth hence, thou art accursed!

A humble Voice:

Oh, enwrap me in thy robes!
Oh, shroud me in thy mantle!
Take me in, between your breasts,
Hug me fast, so that the Grand Voice
Could neither reach my ears

Nor trouble my eyes!
Be thou earth,
And in your brown soil
Let a hollow open up,
To swallow me up!
Oh, be thou water!
Make thy arms into a ship,
And take me thence
To where the clouds and the dark
Are asleep!
Or turn thou into a charmed bottle
Wherein I would turn into wind and vapour
When your flowing locks
Have enwrapped it—shrouded, blotted, obliterated!
Be thou my help and succour
As I face the Lord;
O hide me, take me, enwrap me, shroud me!
Don't let me be lost,
Now my certainty is lost!

Conversation at a Cafe☆

If stormed by sun glare
I leave my nook at the cafe's gate;
If stormed by chill night air,
I leave my window seat
Grinning — my teeth could show in a grin —
Pouting oftentimes — my lips could moan —
But my nightly dream never changes:
I hang down, with a noose round my
Waist, swinging in the air, facing
Black buildings. A gun's report now
Hums all round, like a fly;
Wounded, my body falls down,

☆ From **Meditations on a Wounded Time.**

Fluttering, slowly sinking
In the gaping hollow of the universe.
I fear to be forcibly taken
On touching the soft earth,
To be drawn and hung in
A museum, to flutter there
For ever and ever.

My heart writhes in lonely fears
As in the slow-moving afternoon I wait;
From my window the world appears
Dead, but lying in state,
Pale, with sounds subdued.
Then I take to the street,
To follow women's moving bodies.
I fancy that one hip has left
Its position and clung to another's
Back, that one breast
Now attaches itself
To another's waist—
(That is how I rebuild the universe)

Before long the wings of darkness
Would be spread out, the sights

Before long overcrowd my eyes;
The bodies, stuck together,
Confront and hug one another,
Then, merging, fall down
On the choked horizon.
Other masses emerge from far
Infernal corners; they roll up
Into figures, break down into bodies,
Take shape as trunks, as arms and feet
Advancing towards me. They might, I fear,
Bump into me and, so, I have to stop.
Not knowing what to do, I go
Back to my window.

Sometimes at daybreak I venture out
To a public house
Of a shady character
For a couple of drinks. Oh, there are
A third and a fourth, but these
I empty behind my back
Surreptitiously, then introduce myself
To the barman with the dyed temples.
My name? Well, I have two:
One known to my family,
The other to my followers
And mistresses. The barman winks

As his wet finger points
To a silent woman
Ditched at the bottom
Of the silent inn.
She rises, signlas me to follow,
With trembling knees I follow,
But behind the closed gate
We separate.

— Did I surprise you with this conversation?
— … …
— It was kind of you to listen.
— … …
— Ah, well, I am not really so different from you, am I?
— … …
— Not really so different.

Verse and Ashes
or the Manila Wisdom

Oh, you've come back at last, my lost voice!
For long have wandered in deserts of silence!
A lost shadow in nights of dark moons, my verse,
How fared you in the quotidian prose of nameless
Days — unnamed, unnamable!

Surprised by the echoes of a voice talking
To me, and the voice of my soul, talking
To something, lost behind images coming
And going, radiant and fading,
Floating oftentimes in the foam
Of distant horizons, sinking,
Or breaking as a wave, waning, dissolving,
Then drying up as morning dew —

I asked a question.
On what wing have you flown back,
Shy as a child, delicate as a virgin?
I didn't hear your footsteps
As you walked in again
Into the cold and dreary chambers of my heart.
Did you hide under the smile of that Manila beauty
Whom I saw where I cannot recall—
A marketplace, a reception hall?
No use! Smiles in this country fall
Like dew at all times, to greet your eye
At break of day and at nightfall.

Perhaps you came back wafted on the breath
Of that string of jasmine buds
Thrown round my neck by the kind hand
Of another beauty — another, anonymous!

In a day or two I shall be back in Cairo;
My friends will ask me to talk of Manila;
No memories have I, no memories, that is, to speak of,
But a touch, be it harsh or cruel, of Manila wisdom.

The lips are made to smile,
The heart for hearty laughter,
The eyes are a lover's mirror,
Where images live for ever,
The body for a miracle to perform,



The perfection of a dancer's rhythm,
The meaning and content of form.

The curtains are down,
And shutters block my vision!
My body is stiffened into
A coffin of fear and custom;
I had been brought up into
A different kind of wisdom;
The lore of taboo,
Both sad and low;
The joie de vivre in me is burning out,
But I have time, though,
To collect thoses ashes
In a poetic urn.

Too late it is for a soul to learn a lesson.

Fragments of a Common Sad Tale...

As a candle erect and nude she stood,
The light flooding from her parting,
Her tresses down like molten gold,
And then I knew, was sure, that a word untold
Will to the mystic the mystery unfold
If only true in love he was!
I also knew that a talisman old
Will to the fisherman come ashore
Carried by waves of night uncalled!

Oh, God! What light so bold!

2

The fairy of fantasy fair
Threw down to him her plaits of hair!

He climbed up, thereupon,
Away from the heat so scorching,
To a tower quaint, so high up in air,
And there, his thirst quenching,
Libations liberal were poured;
He now to the bower of bliss had soared!

When morning rose
She wanted him to choose
Between a burning sun, and shade so cool:
Whether to be a chamberlain
In service of her bed, for ever and ever,
Or be transformed into a nightingale
Hanging at the gates of fantasy,
Singing of his joy
In the night of his ecstasy!

3

In the desert of time I feel your presence,
On the rocks of silence I hear your footsteps,
A thrill comes over me
But, like a downpour so sudden,
A fear of death
Surprises me!

4

In loneliness and sorrow I face your eyes,

Demanding ecstasy;
'Drink to me only with thine eyes'
What a toast of bubbling pleasure!
In loneliness and sorrow I face your hand, extending
To raise me from among the ashes,
Elevate me to the rosy twilight of poetry,
In loneliness and sorrow
I face the joy of your love!

5

In your locks I hear the rhythm of words,
In your words I taste vicarious kisses,
In your kisses I stretch over the waves
In the heart of the flood
Washed by radiant foam
By bangles of flowers bangled,
By locks of your hair strangled!

6

O night, O night, night!
I once was a rock, solid and bright,
A statue, good looking,
An idol, so charming!
Before me marched a thousand feet, barbarian,
The feet of thought, barbarian,
Intentions barbarian,

And then I was eroded, disfigured!
O night, O night, night!
Will you cure me, silver clouds
With the sap of morning dew?
O night star, O star of night!
Will you touch me with crystal light
So that, before the night's out
I could my lustre regain
Touched by her rosy fingers!

7

I had been a traveller in the desert of years
With heavy steps and a face grim,
When suddenly you crossed my path,
Lunacy dim!
Never were you once in anticipation,
Never in the symbols of my dreams,
Wakeful or asleep,
The birds never whispered your name,
Though long I have listened to them,
The clouds n'er figured your shape
Though long I have looked at them!

(A man's horoscope remains dumb,
Until surprised by a longing, alone;
He goes back to the listlessness of night,
Unprepared for evening bouts,

Let down by drink and companions,
Knowing nought, but the wind, blowing, shaking him,
Breaking off his dry and ageing twigs,
Leaving him bare, alone, and lean).

But the morning does return,
With a heavy burden,
'Thou shalt learn and learn
Thou can't have oblivion'.

8

My love to you is mounting,
On a borrowed couch, wide,
Though tender, overwhelming,
Like as the waves, when rising,
On a hillside!

9

The thick cloud, fair-fleeced,
Drew the curtain down
End of Act Three, curtain,
Between earth and heaven,
End of Scene!

Let music rest now in the fiddle,
Let the lights go out,
Let the echoes die away, everywhere!

The chorus leader, Time, now talks to the old clown:

'Remove your disguise,
Wash the paint off your face,
Prince charming of the Tower
Is become a paper-tiger
Stifled by ancient manuscripts,
A hollow piper!
And Beauty, the charming princess of yore,
Now looks so pale and wan,
Looking for a man
To give her, tree-like, cool shelter!
She looks for a room, somewhere,
Wherein to tend her miseries,
With ample wall space, for there,
Like pictures framed will hang
The ghosts of runaway memories!

10

What can a flower give me?
Varieties of bliss!
'Can make it so enjoyable!'
Flowers, colours,
The robes of a woman in love,
And faithful!
... ...
What can a flower give me?

Odours inhaled,
Instilled, till drunken;
Flowers, odours.
The breath of a woman in love,
And faithful!

... ...

What does a flower give me?
Sorrow upon sorrow heaped,
In winter missed and remembered!
Flowers, loss.
My eyes longing for a woman, who was in love,
And faithful!

11

The day is bare
More harshly bare
Than the trunk of a tree;
Must I dig deep in time past
To find a few fresh leaves,
Green blades of grass;
Alas!
The bird of oblivion
Had pecked at these so hard,
Oh, drive him out of the orchard,
Kick the evil away from your orchard!

12

The sun was sad,
Pouring down her fire, sad,
Into the eyes, sad,
Of a woman, sad,
And a man, sad,
In a town, sad!

... ...

The winter was with us,
The rain came down, sad,
On a forehead, sad,
Of a man, sad,
In a town, sad!

13

The sea has receded,
Nothing remains
But seabed minerals,
White but cold crystals.
Love has receded,
Nothing remains
But verses wished,
Wise and old, but vanquished!

14

Alone and sad I face what once was your love.

Sailing in Memory

I prepare for the time
Fixed for my journey
At the close of each evening;
I read my incantations,
And, wearing my decorations,
Set my sails on the edges of the clouds;
And, on the open celestial pages,
I read the wind,
Harbinger of the sky,
Pregnant with prophetic news.

The mariners are rioting —
Seamen, rats and memories

Shut up in the veins of my ship —
Turbulent!
Ashen — ashes in the distance —
The horizon opens onto obscure islands
Of the well-known unknown;
While in the shadow of my ship
Seawoods bring the waves to life
And favourable wind, so far,
Swells my sails.

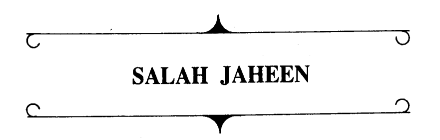
The night's burning, all aglow,
But the last dying stumps
Bring a change of wind;
The mounting waves peck at my decorations
—Vultures of mettle.
My anchor is bandied up and down
In the tumultuous deep.

From behind the dark
A voice now shocks me —
Rocks me —
Reverberating with echoes numberless:
'Present your offering to the angry sea;
'Pour out libations to angry Triton;
'Present an offering...'

Alone I proceed,
The field of waves
Receding under my bark,
Now that I have made the angry sea
An offering of seamen and rats.

Never sail in your memory
Never sail in your memory





SALAH JAHEEN

That's How Much

Lucky's the man
Who can
Articulate;
You're lucky mate!
Speak up, go on, speak!
Shriek and squeak,
Tell all, curse fate,
Complain, dammit,
You'll get away with it!

Lucky you,
You could locate the pain;
You know
What has gone wrong

And your doctor, ere long,
Will want to operate;
O friend articulate!
Swear at him and cry,
You can, can't you, not I!
I have no power to cry,
Nothing will my tongue untie;
That's how it is,
That's how much!

What day is it today?
Winter or summer?
Where am I
What brought me hither?
Am I the landlord, the host?
Or maybe just a guest?
My voice!
I've lost my voice!
I know not what to say,
I have nothing to say,
I know nothing but you, my bonnie lass,
A girl I loved in madness crass.
A place so bizarre
Like a prison cell, or a boudoire
Or a dungeon narrow
With iron bars on the window

And silken curtains drawn.
A draught's getting through,
Sharp, into my being;
My heart, feeling the twinges,
And the wind, howling,
My heart, cringing,
In a yellow sun, snowing,
And the pallid beams so cold,
The dark's turned into ice,
Black and ponderous,
Tons upon tons of ice;
Oh, hide me my girl!
Wrap me up in your hair,
So thick and warm and fair!
'Tis a woollen shawl, my girl,
Your hair
Will beat out the cold,
Oh, take me in my girl,
With hands soft and bold,
In from the cold
I said
And put me to bed

Society

Society, these days, poor thing! has a cold!
It's grown so weak and pale, with a runny nose;
Oh miseries untold! I saw him, I did, looking
For a dose
Of medicine bold
At the drug store,
Looking for tissues, one packetful or more,
And stuffing his pocket with pills galore!

'What happened, dear sir, was
'Before he went to the races
'By less than an hour
'He had a hot shower'.

So foolish, wasn't it, and silly?

I often advised him. 'Society', I said,
'Look to your health! You're no Hercules!
'The cold can penetrate to your knees,
'Be reasonable, be wise!'
I went on to advise,
'The weather, you know how it is,
'Has turned cold in a trice!'

But did he listen? Dear Lord, no!
'Weather what, what weather?' said he;
'Good day to you,
Good day to me!
Shouldn't the Department of Tourism
Do its duty?'
Well, sir, that's what society's like today!

Elegy on the Death of John F. Kennedy

You needn't have done it, John!
To wash your feet, why thus bow down,
To wash your feet, O sweet sweet
In a pool of baptist sun!?

Need your generosity overflow?
Dear Lord! Your soul itself did overflow
O'er hill and dale, o'er air and sky
O why did you die?

Did you do it, John,
To break that oyster open,
A heart with a pearl of love
For once, for a mighty millionaire,

An American white, and fair,
Yet very much a man?

If only man
Could see fellow men
Before it is too late!
Wouldn't be accursed — this life, I mean —
If it has to be a screen
Which we must pull down
If man is to be seen?

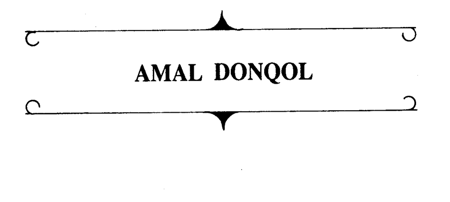
Wouldn't we weep the fate of honour
If turned into a badge,
A sherrif's star, a symbol of power
Which has to be pierced,
To be shot through by rifle fire
If a shepherd is to emerge—
A chosen man to a nation
Promising salvation?

God's peace on a martyr's body,
A baby's body,
In baptism bloody
Taken away from mother's arms,
Sainted high in blackman's rituals,
And entered into everyman's annals.

A lullaby:
John, my Johnny!
My baby bonny!
Sleep on my arm,
Oh, fear no harm,
Though the torch of liberty
Has sunk in apathy
In icy Michigan.

Here is an Arab
A positive African
Singing, lamenting,
Your passing away,
Your immortality!

O John, my Johnny!
Your soul is a fountain pure,
A stream pellucid, and more,
A spring, a mountain spring,
Perpetually gushing,
In one drop,
Crystalline,
As big as the universe
Of John the Baptist!



AMAL DONQOL

Standing on one foot

She nearly said
Who're you?

The black scorpion
Stinging the sun,
Her delicious eyes flashing;

Is it really you?
The gates of my face slammed shut;
I settled down,
I knew it; I remembered,
She'd left her belt, she always did,
In luxury cars.

I fall on the dog teeth

Of filthy moments,
I seek distraction
In the broken glass of silence
Chasing away the butterflies
Of drunken fantasy;
I vanish in fragile threads
Between the tips of the naked dagger
And the delicate lines of her neck,
Between the barefoot and the burning desert,
Between the bullet and the bird.

Her long ear-ring
Swinging
With shadows on the pretty neck
Dancing,
And when she spits
Those little apple pips
And puts out a cigarette
In the old-fashioned ash-tray,
Her eyes would cry
Relax!
How thorny, those lips!

You'll always be there,
A ghost;
And the brothers on both sides of the chasm

When the frothy glass of beer
In the hand of Cain overflows,
Abel, a gentleman so nice
Will have killed you twice.

Could you hand me that coat, my dame,
To conceal my sense of shame,
Of moon sunken in lake,
And a royal beggar
Dodging the shadows
From one tree to another,
Reading the palm of a little bird
With broken legs
Trying to peck at an impossible acorn
Seeing no morn
For he one night believed
The gifts of your lips
Where your short dream did live.

Moon Murder

The painful news was flown,
Sun-posted, through the city:
'The moon's been killed!'
He was seen on the cross, they said,
Head drooping, up a tree in town,
His precious diamond pendant stolen!
Alone in the reeds left behind,
A black myth in eyes blind!

'A Saint', my neighbour said;
'Why was he killed?'
Another said (a maiden bright)
'He liked my song at fall of night,
'And gave me phials of perfume —

'Was that his crime?
'Or did they see him at first light
'Down at my casement long
'Listening to my song of songs?'

There were tears in everybody's eyes —
Trickling down
Solitary tears —
Moon-orphans—
They whispered a prayer
And dispersed!

As mortals die,
He passed away.
And when I tried
To know which hands had done it,
Had treacherously done it,
He never listened —
He was dead!

Having pulled his cloak
Over his face,
And closed his eyes
(I didn't want him to see
What he'd left behind)
I waıked with heavy heart back —

Home, to the village I knew would weep him most
How could I break the news— so sad,
Incredible, horrible!?

'Your father's been killed', I murmured,
'By city hands murdered!
'He's gone, believe me, brothers!
'And tears were shed,
'False, like Joseph's brothers'!
'Killed, he still lay
'On city streets
'Macadamized, bloody, spiteful!'

'Our father isn't dead',
They said.
'Tis a lie, how can he die?
He was here a while ago,
All night long, in fact,
And told us a tale of woe!'

'My brothers, believe me', I said,
'I took him in my own arms
'And closed his eyes myself!'

'Now stop it, you!'
'You cannot know
'What you're saying!

'Wait a few hours
'And in evening bowers
'You'll meet our father —
'Your father and ours!'

When evening came
The moon shone above
With diamond eyes and smiles brilliant;
'Who is it, then', I said,
'That lies on city streets, dead?!'
'A stranger', they answered,
'Thought to be moon, and murdered!'.

Crying before Zarqa al-Yamamah

O sacred oracle!
I have come to you,
Badly mauled and bleeding,
Crawling on the coats of the dead,
Over the piled bodies,
With a broken sword
And a dust-covered brow!

O tell me Zarqa
Of your ruby lips,
Of your virgin oracle,
Of my lost arm, still holding
The downed banner,
Of the pictures of helmeted children
Scattered in the desert,

Of my neighbour who, on the point of drinking,
Was hit by a bullet in his head!

O tell me Zarqa
Of my unarmed stand
Between the sword and the wall;
Of a woman crying
Between the moments of capture and escape;
How did I carry my shame?
How did I go on,
Failing to kill myself
Or collapse?
Hou could my flesh not fall apart,
Touched by the dust of the sullied soil?
Speak, O sacred prophetess!
By God, by the devil, by Damnation!
Do not close your eyes
For the mice are licking my blood
And I cannot keep them away!
How humiliated I feel today!
The night cannot hide my shame,
Nor the walls, nor the newspaper curtain,
Nor the clouds of smoke!
A wide-eyed little girl plays round me,

So sweet to tease;
He spoke of you, my little one,
In the trenches,
And we undid the buttons of our coats
And put down the rifles.
When he died of thirst in the sun-blazing desert
He wetted his parched lips
With your name, then closed his eyes for ever.
How could I hide my face,
Accused and condemned,
And the joyous laugh,
His laugh, his face and dimpled cheeks?

O sacred Prophetess!
Break your silence!
You have been silent, year after year,
To ensure my safety.
'Shut up' they said,
And I was quiet and blind,
Acquiescing in a leadership of eunuchs!
I stayed behind, among the slaves of the tribe,
To guard our flocks,
To shear the wool,
To keep the she-camels in the fold,

Myself asleep in the fold of oblivion,
My food a crust of bread and water,
And some dried dates.
But here I am,
In the thick of fighting, called up,
When the swordsmen, the archers and knights
Had flinched.

I, who never ate mutton,
Never had power,
Was of no consequence,
Banished from the councils of aldermen,
Now invited to die,
Though not to parley with the men!

Speak, O sacred Prophetess!
Speak, O speak!
For here I am,
My blood flowing on the soil which,
Still thirsty, calls for more!
I ask the silence
Which nearly suffocates me:
Why are the camels so slow?
Do they carry rock or iron?
I wonder who would believe me?
I ask all and sundry,

I ask the chains:
'Why are the camels so slow?'

O sacred oracle!
What is the use of poor miserable words?
You told them about the desert caravans
But they said you had faulty eyesight;
You told them about the trees advancing
But they laughed at your garrulous illusion;
And when the edge of the sword surprised them,
They bartered us away,
Then, seeking safety,
Ran away!
We are wounded in the heart,
In the spirit, and the mouth,
Only death remains
And the rubble,
The ruins!
And homeless children
Crossing the last rivers,
And women in bondage driven
In garments of shame,
With heads bowing down,
Uttering feeble cries!

Here you are, Zarqa!
Lovely and blind!
The songs of love, and the lights
And the luxury cars,
And the fashionable dresses
Continue to glitter!
Where then could I hide
My distorted face
So as not to disturb
The vapid, false happiness
In the eyes of men and women,
While you, Zarqa,
Are lovely and blind?



NAGEEB SOROOR

Decrees of
The Elders of Cafe Riche

Preamble:

We, the sages of the cafe, the wizards,
Poets, novelists, painters or, otherwise,
Critics — churchyard lizards —
Who hold the key to paradise,
Hunting for fame at any cost,
Experts, specialists in 'isms',
Who know the worst and best,
Least and most, a mechanism
In which we, the lizards, invest.

And so we, meeting this morning,
Have decreed the following:

Decree I:

Read nothing, though books are a load
You should carry;
Place the load beside a bottle
On a stool;
And, like a fool,
Drink up and wait.
A knight will take the bait
And join you with another load!

A voice

O knights of yerterday!
The day's glory's shed, so has your flair,
Nothing remains today
But clouds, puffs of despair in the air!
Shall we to the cafe repair?
Our world, so poor and lame
Will give us wine of fame
To drown our sense of shame!

A caller:

Oh no! you're not a whore, after all!
Whoredom, *alma mater,* makes me sick!
Nor are you a school, not at all!
You're a cafe for snacks, hot and quick!

Decree II

Do not understand whatever you read;
It's not important; not today, anyway;
The unintelligible
Is clearly understood,
Or is it the other way round?

No-one will ask you to explain
What you mean by -er—er—
It being understood that things plain
And words insane
Have lost their meaning.
What if they retain
Their meaning—one meaning or two?
Well, they should be familiar
To sages like you;
And so, words are but an avenue
To—what? Oh don't ask,
You're not supposed to ask.

A voice

Oh, you wolves! You've murdered
All honest speech, all words of all mettle;
Boys of the 'Duty free' shop!
How cheap the wine in your cell,
How paltry the men you sell!
Can't you sell me a few words,

Duty free or otherwise
To help me compromise
My two worlds?

Have you nothing to offer
But a code impossible to decipher,
A terminology, a jargon,
Fashionable like a hairpiece,
Shining like a glossy magazine?

Oh! There are words, splattered, worthlessly
In advertisements and commercials,
Or unspoken, on the lips of a mercilessly
Rich oil-shiek. He moves a finger,
Summons a singer, wordlessly.

A caller:

Oh! you're not a spinster,
You're a mother of many;
You're not sinister,
Not a harlot either;
You loved so many, mothered so many,
In a land of plenty.

Decree III:

Never keep quiet
Where to be silent is to be ignorant;
But beware; steer clear of today's topic;

It is kept for the day in the attic,
Be sure to look like a professor,
Complete with pipe
And the Latinate tripe.

Say 'in point of fact' and pause,
Say 'there can be no doubt',
But never finish the clause;
Or you could recite part of the introduction,
A passage to fit the induction,
In line with the trend,
Which all comprehend;
The trend.

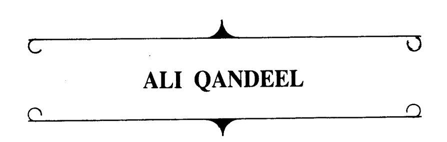
Be sure you're pandering to the trend,
Riding so high, and condescending
To speak to them, but, by and by,
Fall silent again.

A voice:

I see no hope in literature
Shorn of life;
No hope in art,
If a Spartan fife;
Who can change the world, not I;
A poet may, not I;

I have no voice, being human;
I lack the knack,
And all I can is watch
And keep quiet.





ALI QANDEEL

The Rising Beings

Tears are ordained,
Some preordained;
So let your tears flow,
Let them form a river,
Flowing into heaven,
Where nymphs wash their feet,
And prophets quench their thirst;
With your tears make a river
Flowing into the heart of mother earth;
Tears are ordained.

Today I run fast towards — things;
Reminded by the river, made fertile
With the juices of the beginning,

In the Beginning.
Reminded by the Sun,
Which blew flames of green fire
Into my being;
Reminded of hope,
Indescribable;
It needed no reminding; it can forget nothing;
Filling my being, inalienable,
This earth is all mine.
In my blood are all the enzymes I have concocted,
All the voices I have loved,
Meet in my throat, thwarted;
Grapes of gold, balls of copper,
And my heart, burning on all sides,
Burning, burning, burning.

To be among the wombs,
A tortured seed, not yet born,
A boiling sun,
An embryo, radiating prenatal knowledge.

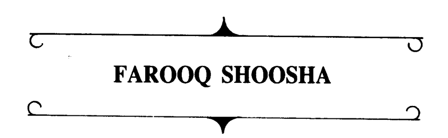
What has the rain said to you
In lonely nights, in the dark,
You firy spark?
He came from afar,
Like a sleepless stallion,

With thundering hoofs,
And echoes many,
Wherein were poems, prophecies and proofs.
He was my purgatory, my pyre,
Spoke of the unspeakable,
Kindled a fire
In both eyeballs and, questionable,
Passed through my tones
Into the convolutions of fancy.

Hamlet, Nietche and I,
Three madmen;
On the beach we met
At midday,
Exchanged silence;
Blown up by live coals and incense.
I knew it,
Hamlet dived into the sea, after a gold fish,
Nietche pushed me in, after him,
Squeaking, squealing,
For then a goddess discovered
That something had drilled a hole into the solid earth;
A hundred divine arms bandied Nietche up and down
In the autumnal breeze
Then threw him in with us
Into the darkness of the seabed.

We exchanged silence again
Though silence here had
A more rational madness.
The new milieu forced us to do something;
We couldn't agree, the three of us, on anything;
Indeed, the three of us were mad,
But then the surface of the earth
Was only a dream.

Well, let me put it to you:
Should we die because we couldn't meet in the sea?
Would you approve of this, dwellers on the surface?



FAROOQ SHOOSHA

A Poetess in Love: An Elegy

Was he a painter
Drenching in colour
The face of sad times?
Did he use for his oils
The heavy and weary hours,
Until black merged
Into white and white merged
Into black, together projected
In forms and shapes uncouth?
Did he opt in the end to leave
In search of a prophecy
That played in the eyes
Of the day-crowded young?
Was it a prophecy of children

Yet to be born —
Who would perforce be born — at dawn,
Not night-orphans but a real breed of men,
To foster his dream and unfold his tale —
The story bizarre
Of how he wore a cloak of grandeur
And destroyed his painting kit,
When his colours couldn't
Blot out the sorrow of the land
Or overpaint the blackness
Wherein human clay
In darkness lay.

II

Was he a music maker
To whose tunes the night sobbed,
Who with a melodious sting,
Broke both heart and string,
And poured forth a liquid sorrow
Into the eyes of the morrow?
Oh, how sweet is pain:
    The eyes shall with tears be purged,
    The earth with regret crushed.
Was he a music maker

And you his deep wound,
His silence-enamoured wound?
And when his hands had bled
With the last echo of fierce sound,
When his eyes were blinded
By the sight of oppression
That shut out the rising sun,
Did he give to the wind
His lyre? Did he cut out the strings?
He was believed to be laid to rest,
Dissolving into notes unblest.

III

Was he a lover
With only you to whisper:
'There was a man...'
To give him form, shape and colour,
To give him a voice, words and flavour;
To give him eyes peering into things
And pondering the secret hidden
In the mist of the evening?
Were you the only one
Who could wonder at the sound
And the sight and the might?

Was he inspired, you the inspirer?
Overcome by longing, did he
Seek his divine embers
In the soft touch of your fingers?
Did he in the chill of cruel winter
Set his hands ablaze
And sink into your bosom
For a wintry shelter?
The spark in his hand did quiver
Once or twice, I remember,
But finally melted on paper!

IV

Let's fall back on paper,
For who could question our paper?
Who could extricate our dark secret
From the heap of passions bereft?
Your wordless poetry, your verses sad
Are a painting suddenly orphaned,
A last line in the story of life.
Who will relate the story
With the sad ending, to posterity?
The story of eyes twinkling
With joy, with abundance, with plenty,

Deepened with the joy of colour and shade,
With the grief of disillusion, of insecurity.

I rummage through the travel-weary briefcase
In search of a sign, a glimpse,
A spark, a shadow, a heap of ashes —
But the gloom gathers and the traces
Disperse and the moon departs.

V

O childish face in closet of old age
Overflowing with grandeur and love!
O body fair, tall and serene,
A mine of virgin treasures
Untouched by human hand,
Unsearched by human eye,
An orchard fragrant, a bower high!

Her steps were evening music, enchanting,
Her voice a rhythm of joy, dancing,
Her soft whispers in the ears of night,
A wisdom heaving;
But 'oh for a draught of vintage'
To quench the thirst beating

In ribs burning,
To extinguish the fire in eyes straining,
To nurse a motherhood deprived,
Dissolving into eagerness confined!

Oh for a healing hand
To dress the scars of a scorched land!
Could anyone suppress a volcano dire
Pouring forth a passion fire?
A passion molten and fire defeated
And love so sadly wasted!
The child, so old, closes an eye resigned
While life runs away in silence;
Nothing can bring back old time.

VI

Bound for you, leeward, agony,
With eyes fixed on a balcony
Where once was an ivy plant
That shaded the scene
Of meeting and parting
And hours of luxurious night
So pure and brief;
The procession of the evening
Led day into night;

The words on lips, dancing,
Did tell some tale, some song,
Rich and drunken
With shade and passion.
In the night women wear the face
Of suspended time;
Secrets, perfume-like, are wafted
From phials obscure;
In the veins a snake of desire blind
Stretches, coils to stretch
In the night
A bridge between the eyes extends,
The steps slow down,
The feet stand still,
Reality merges into fancy
Springing feeling lunacy
And the skin wears the brightness of life;
In the night,
The grand truth of life
Turns false.

VII

Oh, I dream of remote islands,
Of an oak with branches intertwined,
Horizon bound,

With lovers' names on the trunk inscribed!
I dream of a beach
Where the strand still bears
The footprints of a couple merged into one,
A couple of words in a verse!

I dream of sands, of deserts, of fertile worlds,
Of grand oriental cities
Grown into fantasy, into magical casements
Opening, to a tremour of frenzy,
On a wonderland!

I dream of a bird, a seagull,
An albatross, voyaging through seas uncharted,
Carried by the waves unwearied,
To live the childhood of those untired
Seamen, embracing the sun at noon,
Burning their fronts bright
In search of joyous light!

I dream of going back to your age,
A thoughtless youth, dreaming like fond lovers,
Of an audience with you,
O queen of all women,
Commanding, expostulating,
Forgiving, granting your precious love
To whomever you choose,

Brooking the levity
Of bold aspirers!

I dream of going back to an age gone away,
To your age, for ever dead,
To your illusion, said and unsaid,
I dream of remote islands.



Alienation

About to fall in labyrinthine words,
In abysmal sorrow,
So vast in deserts of the spirit,
I drift, am carried along
By a stupendous stream of our age's excrement;
I am pulled up by the roots,
Thrown in the face of time,
A trembling shadow, defeated,
Cold-whispered and—stabbed!
The dagger is not fatal—
Has a scorching edge
And fills my face with curses!

About to sink in Lethe,
Where the loss begets death,
And the voices are mute;
Where the noise of the dead
Is a stifled breath in the silence;
I toy with the bodies,
I shroud them,
Play with prayers;
In vain I lift my head
From the pit's bottom
In search of the words aglow—
The virgin words
Strangled by the hands of guards.

About to slough off the false
Garb of sense, the illusion of fate,
The curse of this time
Lurking behind the faces;
I feel I could look you in the face
And see you in the bright light
And the bright darkness,
Unmistakable figures
Of magnitude
And voices with curses distorted

And the certitude
Of dwarfs
Defeated, exhausted and thoroughly crushed—
In the embittered night.

About to slough off this garb
Threadbare and hole-riddled,
Which we had on, all of us,
Which we tried for size, but kept on,
Thinking it could conceal our shame
And hide our panicking faces,
Let me advance my judgment, decisive,
You, word-cowards and time-panders,
Sons of silence and grandsons of labyrinth,
Knights of the night and voice of the light
Let me stab you with a broken sword—
The word!

My words!
A desert, an arid waste and barren,
A fate whose tied edges I now expose
Bold or cowardly;
I alone interpose between

These earthly orbs
In their hungry rounds.
'Down with the author of this line!
'Long live the bard who chants his verse so hollow
at the party!
'Well, really! We've seen worse!
'He's a good rope-walker!
'A brilliant word-carpenter!
'Fanfare for the word circus!'

Alone I look round at you,
You're all about me;
I claim that mine
Is the beginning of the Book of Genesis;
I see things with an eye
That knows not humiliation;
I taste all things with the lips of a lover
Absorbed in the lips of another,
Crying from the top of a bare mountain
With a wilderness all round;
I call on you, friends, beloved and poor,
To drive a hole in the darkness
Of a night that's dragging on.

Departure

Of your universe torn out, leaf-like, I fly!
Turning my back on a world so strange!
Anachronistic bard!
Were I born in another age,
A turban or a hat
Equally flat,
Could have adorned my head;
And I could've joined
The procession of brilliance,
Of murmuring intelligence;
Could have added a face so sweet
To the beauty of the court elite,
Brightened the hearts

Of court potentates
And cheered up the Sultan's mates!

I could've walked with an air
Of panache, proud of my flair—
So near to the Throne,
A confidant fair!
A knight in armour,
Unique in power,
If ever a battle was done!
But Oh! for a poet born in your age!
His arrows must miss,
His horse must fall,
His rhetoric runs false,
And the race he must lose!

Where are the words apt and proper
To build up my panegyric power?

No longer am I the bravest knight,
Never could I bear my symbol of might,
The standard high,
Nor force my way,
Both far and nigh,
In the fearful din of the fight!
Fumbling, failing, falling,
I can have no comfort in tears.

I therefore crouch in peace
Away from the rattle of swords,
Reiterating words
Of a defeated lover!

But my tale I embellish
With a thousand figures of speech,
Wearing the visage of an ancient knight,
The face of a victor,
Of a verse conqueror!

And I do it to avert arraignment:
'A cowardly poet', one will whisper,
'His similes are bad, his allusions worse,
'And the ideas he'd whimper:
'Unspeakable verse;
'And all he does is shed blood
'On paper, repeating magical words
'In praise of his beloved,
'Wetting her cheek with tears!'

That's why, my lords, I'm your
Obedient servant-lover,
Who says nought, nought knowing,
Of passion power!

But Oh! companions dear!
I crave my share of joy

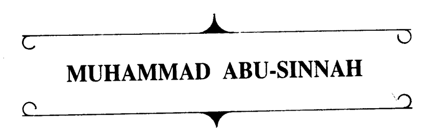
(Should be a fair share too!)
How I wish I were one of those
Who emerge in every field,
Shine in every town square,
Lurk in every nook and cranny,
Violate every sanctity,
Shatter human dignity,
And break all laws!

Or one of those who storm your sight,
Revel in sapping the praise
Of the good and the kind;
Well-versed in the movement of the Times,
Who have absorbed all experience,
But, unable to be explicit,
Now turn to hints—
To innuendoes!

Oh! give me back my old tattered garb!
Oh! give me back my old face,
My shaky fortune,
My barren sorrow!
There's no roof over my head,
No shelter in your land,

For, coming down upon this age
I fell down on the claws
Of gloom and times so strange!

Torn out of your universe,
I fly away
From the shackles of verse,
From repeated numbers
Of names, faces, seasons,
The cycle of things,
As all about me strut and rot,
I look for another city,
Another sky,
A foolish and idiotic bard, you'll cry,
For I've harnessed my steed
And ventured into the wilderness;
My departure has begun
Never at speed
But in numbness.



MUHAMMAD ABU-SINNAH

Because you're not familiar with the Kingodm of Night

You die,
Though your death is a resurrection
At a festival of blood;
Seagulls! they all scream on the flood;
Butterflies weep;
The roses wonder what your name is,
But all the stars in the sky above can never tell;
They only gallop,
Flouting celestial orbits,
To dig a grave for you in the sea,
To build a city
From the long years of agony,
Where fear and love do live,

Where death and terror survive
And earthquakes rejoice.

You prayed
For the sun of love to rise
On the water,
For song trees to sprout
In blood-stained rocks
For the light of heaven
To be born in the heart.

You die
As though you're making a journey
To love,
You collect the last farewell songs
And announce the death of the stars
To the sea,
And announce the death of the seas
To the star,
You tell the grass that rocks are growing,
Spreading, extending their kingdoms everywhere,
That daggers are here
To cut a path for hatred,
To cut a hole in the night
For another night,
And announce to the morning

That darkness
Wants to ascend the throne,
To stop the eyes dreaming of light,
To keep the day a prisoner
In the shells and grottoes,
And announce that love is dead,
That hearts are dressed in hatred
To cross the river of poison,
That justice is fettered,
Whipped and battered
By the legal machinery.

You die,
Because you never knew the Kingdom of the Night
Never knew how lamps are being shattered,
Rather, executed, therein,
Never knew that the good days are gone
And cruel old age has set in.

You die
Because of the slanderers
Who have established proof
Of your impossible love
For the moonlight.

You die
Because you claim
That innocence is possible,
That happy times originate in the heart,
That love is a beautiful river,
That tolerance can stand up to the night,
Can stand up to the impossible.

Because you defended that which is dying
You die,
To be resurrected
At a festival of blood, out in the fields.
Because you're different in the spring
Daggers besiege you,
Killed in the night,
The day weeps you.

The Winter Garden

Our roots, they sighed
And in the quiet of evening died.
Nothing's been left us
y the ruthless claws of winter,
Nothing remains behind, which you,
Vernal splendour,
Might come back to: nothing
But a willow tress
Over which the winds jostle
While we, the crippled, now ponder
A long shadow on the black wall
Now missing. A dumb sight.
And the dumb sights of memories,

Of the last days of winter,
Exert our eyes. We still look round,
Perhaps a solitary seed
Is somewhere to be found;
Perhaps it will spread its wing
And help you fly back in, spring;
Perhaps the wistful look
In the eye of a lover unrequieted
Will recover the lost glory
If on the roadside you pass by,
Perhaps a young girl sleeping
In the bowers of light
Will see in the radiance
Of your delightful colour
Her budding breasts;
Perhaps a poet searching the green rill
Will find the pearls playing, at will,
With the roses of your prime;
Perhaps a bird who had lost her love
Will find it in your bowers;
Perhaps the dreams, now entombed,
Will breathe again.
But we, who still wait,
Expect none to return,
 Knowing that the longing that quickens in the dark

Can never bring back
That longing which sighed
And in the quiet of evening died.

O Spring! if you happen to cross our path,
If your beautiful blue eyes
Glance through our tenements,
Give us a greeting of peace —
Leave it at our doorstep.
Should you want to reprimand us,
You'll get merely shy excuses;
For we sit here, crippled,
With no shadows
On the black dreary walls.
We may miss the colours and the light
But, waiting for the departed to come back,
We sit still, impotent
In the winter garden.

Bloody Sights in an Indifferent City

Cold and dead you lay;
Your face departing in riparian clouds,
And carved on the wind by the rocks;
You go…
      Your face pales out.
Your body tells me nothing about you;
The looks in your sleeping eyes vague
Cannot give me an explanation of the plague;
You slept,
Your dress slipping
Below your breasts,
Below your thighs,
And the black blood
Coming down in a flood

Crept over the poisoned lawn
No pulse is heard in your feverish heart
No pulse is heard in your feverish heart.

2

The tourist asks me about the oldest
mausoleum
Among your towering tombs.
The jungles of history turned to me;
There was a sign which in the night gleamed
And, over a mausoleum, screamed;
'This is the mausoleum of freedom'.

The tourist asks me
About the meaning of our historic wisdom.
I saw an old man fall down under the wheels.
Indifferent
Passers by passed
A woman in labour between the rails on the
railway
And a murder committed at the mosque;
The murderer rose up in life
And the murdered man was trampled under-
foot.

— The tourist asks me

What kind of secret weapon did you hide
In the corridors of tottering history?
A sound burst out in the night:
Fireworks had made up a sign in the sky
Commemorating the millenial anniversary
Of a tear holding out in the eye, nay,
In the eyes of thousands, all hungry.
Words in yellow can be read
And words in red
Of which I discerned
In the din of night
A few letters which shyly whispered:
'Patience is the weapon of the weak
Patience is the weapon of the weak'..
… …
The tourist asks me
What is my name?
The dagger hung over me,
And the red beak broke through my skull;
My name? — a blood tree!
My name? — a lamp being shattered!
My name? What's in a name?
I'm being murdered;
But don't ask who the murderer is;
Spite?

- Bumper harvest of it this season!
ho's the murderer?
spair?
eigns over this dumb metropolis!
ve?
sn't been to our city since it was taken over
by hate!
e night?
Well, since the lovers departed
nd the poets died,
obody has lived in the night
ut the red-blood-sucking bats!
ear?
Iost inclined am I to believe it!
ear is the murderer!
Most inclined am I —
Security is the victim!

.. ..

The tourist asks me:
Does she still parade her beauty to strangers?
Still nibbles at the wistful crumbs
At the deserted table of history?
Is she still breathing among her tombs
Dreaming of a Paradise Regained?

3

Cold and dead you lay
The looks in your sleeping eyes vague
Cannot give me an explanation of the plague;
You slept,
Your dress slipping
Below your breasts,
Below your thighs,
And the black blood,
Coming down in a flood;
Crept over the poisoned lawn;
No pulse is heard in the feverish heart.

Within my heart, however, was a voice
— Who will resuscitate her?
Who will love and die for her?
The red beak broke through my skull.
I was alone.
You slept.
The tourist went away,
And the signboard hoisted over the square screamed:

Indifference!
Live or Kill!
Indifference?

Live or kill?
O God, O God!
What will the future be?
What will the future be?



The rose I have offered
To the sun and the rain
Today's in waste, and withers.
Whenever I tried
To wash history in rivers
Blood did creep on the face of waters,
The fish read me novel history,
The blue stars, far away,
Spoke of fetters —
The gleam in their eyes,
Their heart's warmth—fetters—
Waiting for you to come back.

You had promised, I remember,

To bring me a rose and a sword;
You'd promised to come, at sundown,
With a word,
A stallion in harness full,
And a moon in visitation full,
Promising dew to the green
And to me a ditty beautiful!
Where are you now?
Where can you be?
For days, for years, I waited,
Lovers have sold me to traders,
Traders to fornicators,
And my bed-chamber
Nightly moves from one highway to another!
Sold at a Baghdad market-place,
Purchased at a Damascus fair,
Kidnapped by highwaymen in the desert,
But again traded in,
From sorrow to sorrow
Changing hands,
A thousand times a mother
And each time a boy is born
Who, naked and starved, dies —
Is dead;
And all the traders know is

I'm good in bed!
I have slept with highwaymen and kings
And none'd looked into my eyes
To feel how my inside burnt
Since you departed.
I once had a dream.
Your bold face had come from afar,
I decked my chamber
With a rose, a cloud and a star,
I sprinkled two drops of Nile waters,
A whole wave from Barada,
I knew how much you loved water,
Coming from afar;
I planted a palm tree on the roadside,
Hired a musician to lead vour procession
Up to my home,
Heard in my womb
The chanting of a thousand happy generations
Coming.
I sang, and washed and wanted you,
But in the morning
Only the invaders arrived,
Armed with hate,
Masked with tyranny.
It was the morning

When I saw the swords
Flung over my head,
The thorns at my feet,
And fire in the palm trees,
And the chamber
Was overrun by the horsemen,
And the night swallowed up
My lantern light.

Whither roamest thou, I sing,
Whither art thou?
In the desert turning the stones
In search of a word from heaven?
Continuing your rounds of the unknown
Looking for an explanation
Or justification
Of a malady so horribly prolonged?
Perhaps you're crossing one river after another
Riding one sea into another
In search of my medicine
Beyond the farthest coast!
Perhaps you're at Suez and the Golan,
Waiting for the fire to tell the invaders
That love and life always triumphed

Before coming
To have the land of history
Once again under the plough.



At the Station

The train,
With both eyes bright,
Waited for the rain
To stop blotting the sight
(Irregular, though seasonal)
While we stood still
Fighting a tremour of lunacy;
For behind the still, tall,
Dark, night wall
Gleamed pale lights of memory.

You wore black and looked pale;
Departed in flashes,
Searching the ashes

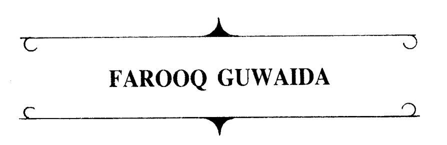
Of things visible
For a green seed,
Invisible,
Dreaming of the spring.
You asked the usual silly question
Whose answer I kept back
As silent I resisted the destruction
Of this city;
The death of history
At the mainline station!

And then you asked:
'Was it all a lie?
Your vows had assured me
Our love would live for a thousand years,
That enthroned it would survive
Both starlight and peace
Was it all a lie then?'
'Can't remember when', I said,

'Never lied to you!
But simply was in love
Which now you see is dead!
Has been killed in an accident,
A mystery still unsolved:
I deny having done it,

And you plead innocent!

But the wind, my darling,
Has given us away,
And all the eyes are turned to us!
The train is about to leave
For another night and another day!
Shall we run away then
Again and yet again?



FAROOQ GUWAIDA

Waiting for the train

'I'll be back', she said,
'In the spring', and waved her hand.
I could not wave back.
I looked at the carriage in silence:
I was alone.

A child crying after its departing parents;
A departing hope, autumnal shadows
Lengthening; the setting sun, already
Behind the horizon, swallowed up by
The dunes, and the last breath of old summer
Wandering aimlessly about me;
They all spoke of freezing winter days

And the passengers behind a closed door —
Waiting for the train.

The station clock, chiming away
The shadows of the day
Numberless, and the seats
In the waiting room, despairing —
I had to run away.

She'd gone, I had to speak to semeone,
Words that echoed in the sad vacancy;
Would no one answer me? Our eyes, in tears,
Had met, and November vapours filled
The evening sky; and smoke — a memory
Left behind to comfort me.

I walked back.
The road was deserted and the seats
Empty, and a melancholy tune in the distance.
A prisoner of a dreamless life.
She would be back in the spring, she said.
I spend the day at the station,
And in the evening, I walk back home,

Not home any longer, for the train
Comes back every day, and people go home,
But the road remains deserted,
And the seats empty,
And the waiting room still cold.



Departure of the Sun

Time: Darkness floating
Round the shores of Night's big eye,
The streets in mourning,
Both far and nigh,
An old man asleep on the pavement;
Then came and went
A cat
And a mouse
Squat;
Having nibbled at the mouse,
What's left of it,
The cat
Thought it only fit



To dance in frenzy high;
The old man's maw gives a cry:
'O Lord of all being,
In this age of famine, dry
Men are become locusts
And die!

Age: All age is time wasted
Days blasted, a year past,
Two or ten,
Don't know how or when,
All age is at the feet of the wind
And the night devours all morning,
Wounds engendering wounds.

My Time: 'Tis said
I'd arrived at a moment sad;
But what I say is
I'd come at the wrong time;
What's the use of being right
Or bright
If all around you, says Kipling,
The world and people thinking,
Are wrong?
On this road our steps disperse;
In the soul's depth

We retire and converse
On illusions feeding,
Great and to the point,
With the time moving,
Though out of joint!

Life's address:
On the envelope I venture
The name of our old street —
Can't remember the name
Of the new one!
Poor street has a story long:
Having changed names and hands, often,
It cannot be recalled
What it would be called.

My own story is different,
For I once was, 'tis said,
A knight gallant of yore,
But, though my life's become a cobweb
And because I refuse,
'Spite the inviting tombs and earth's death,
To die,
They dubbed me a knight
Who refuses to die.

Day One
After departure
Of the Sun:
Yet unhavened, a desire in flood,
In my blood,
Your love does run,
A child-like longing,
And a dizzy game of parting,
A dream of things past
A memory in a heart that, beaming,
Brightens the stifled evening, and
In a stifled daytime
Stifled my home in silence.

The rats in our alley
Have run amuck in the rooms,
And the visionary ears of corn
Despairing expire;
In my mirror
I looked
On the ashes of my face:
The creeping age leaves a trace,
A chart of my years' sorrow.
What have you left behind the morrow?
An old man,

Repeating his words, mincing them,
Forgetting them, eating them up,
Only to realize
That there's something not to be said!
Not that I care any more for words—
People know what's there to be said
But what I say cannot be said.

Day One
The hundredth and one, bis,
After departure
Of the Sun.

A question asked my son
Why art thou so sad, father?
You haven't smiled for a thousand years!
Are you afraid, I wonder,
Of the monster in the big river?
It's the monster, 'tis said, who devoured
All the birds, now is eating the flowers!
It's the monster that eats up,
Drinks up,
The years of our time,
Going round the streets
The children to strangle,
Tombs to desecrate.

The monster drinks up river water
Urinates in the old river
To drink it up once again.
Our old river is a well
That human tears swell!
Our old river's a wound of depth infinite
Where on all sides wounds grow
And the monster wallows in the wounds,
The monster wallows in our wounds!

I crave your odours sweet
When dark shadows hang on the night
And dim the star light.
' Tis odd', my son says,
'You haven't smiled for a thousand years!'
Well, what I know is,
My heart has shared the sorrow
Of the river,
Of orphans on the roadside,
A sleepless, obstinate sorrow.

Day One
The thousandth and one, bis,
After departure
Of the Sun.

There is a strange smell in the street,
And my napkin feels ancient;
My sorrow seeps into the vacancy
And the quivers of my fingers,
And my finger tips, they quiver,
Feeling my dead warbler.
He'd cried in the eyes
And warbled for succour,
But fell at my home's far end
And bled and bled.
His plumage's grown into a long feather,
A wintry cloud,
Which brushed my eyes,
And the blood,
A ghost incorporeal,
In a heart unreal,
Bemoaned the dead warbler.
Time hurries and scurries
And the beautiful dream
In silence stands,
And withstands
The sorrows of departure.

Day One
The...and One, bis,
After departure

Of the Sun.
I can no longer see you.
As a cloud you passed by.
A breeze blowing on my years.
Back to the long summer have I been hurled.
For in the shadows of twilight
I could watch your odours!

Years are playthings.
Fears are daily fare.
And each hope despair disturbs
So that people spurn their foes.
When the street warbler died.
The counting of the years stopped.

Not taking pity on the dying oil
In our midnight cresset.
The night has hidden the beam
Held by the moon.
The candle bereft.
With tears so many wept
Then crouched in the arms
Of darkness.
But I believe them all.
For all did fall

Silent, after your departure.
The night, the moon we have killed,
The candle lost, and the flute wounded.

Would someone take away
My days?
The long, advancing lays,
So that the Sun of my city
Would rise again?
O Sun!
Your ancient knight
Still laments his passing away
After departure!

Features of an old face—lost!

Unable to recall the features
Of my old face,
I pondered time fractures;
Unable to trace
The lines on my skin
So pale, though dark and thin,
I pondered the shadows gathering
Round my eyes, the lunacy playing
Within, that blot out the features of Time!

The glisten in my eyes froze,
The blood that flowed,
Dream stumbles in my veins,

Now fell, now rose,
Now, dead-still,
Was a pellucid rill!
With the wreckage of days
My words pale into silence,
Repeated rounds;
My voice burns up into ashes;
Where are the echoes
Of the old voice
Reverberating with sense?
But I do hear the winter's tale,
The ghosts of snow terrors,
The screams of a heart
In search of the features
Of an old face.

Time, a bird of prey untethered,
Feeds on the robins within;
Time battens on falsehoods,
Unreal panegyrics, unreal words!
The rubble of faces covers the landscape,
As the slaughter goes on within.
I have learnt to brave all fears,
Not to be stifled by falsehoods,

But my tragical history
Is a face grown to mystery!

In the night I came across it
Glancing at fear, fearing the glances,
But I saw other faces, shouting, pouting, doubting,
Pondering the meaning of grimaces.

I once was told
I'd been seen to fall —
As a fallen love story,
An unfinished tale,
A dream in a cave
On which a rising wave
Of human pain breaks!

I was told I had hid
Behind the veil of Time,
A trickling tear,
A Memory of regret,
A relic,
Remains of an ancient prophet,
A smiling prophet,
Who in the afterlife still preached!

I was told I was heard
To sing, was heard
To cry, but the lies abound
To cast in the shadows,
The features of my ancient face.

To recapture my face I resorted
To my palette, my melody old,
But all I recalled
Was a bare line here,
An eye and a nose
Glowing sadly under a pale forehead,
While the wrinkles dead
Came alive, crept quietly behind
The years — wherein emerged a face!

Oh! I recall it well,
The twists and turns I now retrace
On people's doors,
On the minaret at the crossroads
In the dust I see my face!
But two eyes gleam in the clouds
And a face appears there — too —

Appears here, there and everywhere,
Though the face is no longer
The face I had known:
Its features all gone.



Four Lyrics

(1)

Oh life is but a day,
With you to spend,
So don't throw it away,
In sorrow without end!

All life is but an hour,
Minutes ticking, so few,
What boots it for a flower,
To lament its vernal dew?

All life is but a pansy,
Drunk with mortal nectar;
Let's drink up that fancy,
Like the mortals we are!

(2)

The waves will wash off your footprints,
And mine, so many, on the strand;
And under 'em a dream will be buried,
One of your dreams, so many, in the sand;
But a memory of your days,
Will float in the waves,
And haunt the land!

(3)

And so we meet again, strangers
Where once we were fond lovers!

Time is a liar, nothing has lasted,
And all our hopes are blasted!

Whither is the flower we had?
Has it gone to seed?

'Oh, don't ask!', Time said,
'Tis turned into a weed!

(4)

Your love the days of my life disowned,
It had been a sin, so willingly condoned;

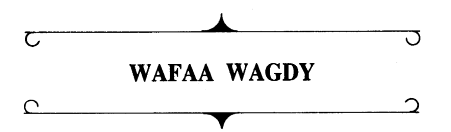
Did I crucify that heart undaunted

To be left with a ghost, for ever haunted?

There can be no virtue higher,
Than this our parting;

No expiation, no fasting, no prayer,
Could wash it off, no ranting!





WAFAA WAGDY

Two Rumour Poems

One:

The sundown stream was pellucid
When the forest apes met
To pray around the stream,
The chief idol set.
A scabby boy, it is told,
Happened to pass by, and
Without a word,
Threw a stone in
And ran away—Good Lord!
All the apes soon followed suit!

At sunrise
The boy was back and,
Stretching a disfigured hand

With a cup —
What makes you stop?
The water is bad,
He shouted out
And all the apes, Good Lord,
Did follow suit:
The water is bad,
Disgustingly sad!

Two:

Rumour has it
That in the heart of the city
A miraculous pond
Appears after dark.
In that muddy pond,
They all aver,
The moon is couched.
And to the accursed pond
Some still come round
To stone the moon.
The others throw down their nets
To catch him alive!

Blood Wedding

It was a wedding night
When the lights went out,
All village lights
And someome said
Stray bullets hit all the lamps
And the guests whispered,
'A bad omen';
But the bawdy wedding chaos went on:
Language foul,
Words, sounds, bandied up and down
By the men.

'But Oh! What a mess!
Red stains on the white wedding dress',

Cried an alderman.
There's nothing to fear, cried another,
'Tis all right, Lord Mayor,
'Tis the hectic colour
Of henna sweet
Decorating both hands and feet
Of your daughter
The bride-to-be,
This wedding night.

It's all right then, quite all right.

Village night guards!
If one of you lights a match
On this pitch dark night watch,
He'll surely learn the truth
Of this blood wedding;
He'll see under the stain
A beauty, the only village beauty,
Suppressing a cry of pain.
O village watchmen, listen!
God! doesn't the bawdy night lengthen!
Didn't the Mayor ask you (hope I'm mistaken)
To be vigilant?
To hold a lantern in one hand
And a revolver in the other?

Didn't he want the carousal
Of his daughter's nuptial
To grow into music
In ballad immortal,
Melodiously chaunted
Both haunting and haunted?

The watchmen went giddy,
And the wedding bloody!

Oh! dawn is again upon us,
And all asleep,
Even the bawdy words on the lips
Of night watchmen.
But first light brings a funeral
And the ghost of yesterday's bride
Looking for the watchmen:
Let's hang'em high,
On palm tree trunks
Both far and nigh!
Let's ask them now
How a wedding can turn into a funeral
And where our bride may be?
What boots it now to be sad
When sorrow is neither good nor bad
When none is sane — or mad!

A morning angry song:
Let all gas lamps,
Those dark and suffocating tramps,
Be smashed;
Let's dump in the canal
All samovars banal,
All damned papers,
And hand-rolled fags!
Let the country circle disband
Stop the chatter and natter and... scatter!
Oh, can we for once pause
And learn the real cause?

A Vision of the Wound

Don't stop!
It's futile to stop,
For I leave or drop
What the feet tread down,
What they own to disown.
Nor do I loiter around
In the sumptuous halls of time,
Living as I do
In a topless tower,
And having a summit of my own.

When your footsteps stammered
And the chill silence quivered

In your hands, I realized,
Without a word spoken,
That the gulf had swallowed you up.
My eyes were clouded
As I watched you fall.
I saw you,
I pitied you.
If you had wings
You could never have fallen.
But, being a statue of clay,
You were destined to fall away,
Bearing from the first your seeds of destruction,
Even if the sculptor had been Pygmalion.

It was no tragedy that the statue fell,
It was perhaps as well,
But then I couldn't, how could I,
Breathe life into the effigy,
Give it wings,
And watch it fly?

Oh, don't talk!

For words often wound,
And the pains that flow,
The pains you feel,
Time cannot heal.



Word and Sword

Whatever is based on falsehood
Falls down —
A word, a building, darkness;
The crows fly away,
The snakes go to their hideouts,
If only you said 'no',
If only you stuck your sharp claws
Into the flesh of old silence,
If only you tore up the skin,
Broke the shell and found a kernel 'no' in!

Motion would quicken the dead,
Reason would restore a mad head,
Fog should disperse at will,

And doors should fling wide open,
For the stream of days to run on,
Naked and pure;
Light should flow
To brighten the streets, sullied
By the silence and the kneeling down
If only a frown
Could signify 'no'.

You have, sir, scattered our evenings
On the graves;
Aroused our laughter
At the monstrously tragic and exciting;
Buried the heart in the pit of silence.
You did, sir, share our last supper
But played Judas so well;
The food is still bitter,
And we are still so hungry,
And have to eat, haven't we,
And the big knife hangs down for them
Who turn away,
A sword will deal with them who say 'no'

Can I for once, sir, say 'no'?

The Seven-Day Sonata

The fabric of my days is woven
Of love's rays, glowing,
Love's eyes, beaming,
And a song, drunken, dreaming...
Each day is a note,
A step on a scale,
Near and remote.
Day one,
A sunshine morning beauty
In Beethoven's Pastoral symphony.
Day two,
The strings of a violin,
Brought alive
By Paganini's finger-tips.

Day three,
A tune by Apollo played,
By Aphrodite's beauty swayed.
Day four,
A sonata echoing,
In a moonlight evening.
Day five
The sorrow that heaves,
And leaves,
In the notes of an Arab flute.
Day six
A poetry recital.
But on day seven, my love,
All is dwarfed by a hearty laugh,
A childish laugh,
With echoes all above.


M. AFIFI MATAR

Summer Colt

A summer colt is let loose:
Who has let him loose?
He gallops,
He trots on the bridge,
Green-hoofed, neighing,
With bells of grass,
And blue bells ringing,
With exhalations hot, silver-foaming:
The summer colt: who let him loose?

He runs so wild in wisdom green,
And on that scene,
Of virgin grēen,
Is all adancing!

He runs to the rill,
A pool so still,
To feed on lotus flower,
On water hyacinth,
In tremulous bower,
So deep into the land,
To devour the odour
Of a little life sprouting
In the womb of the earth.

And now he wades in mud and bog,
With hoofs splashing,
And muscles adashing,
To the sun,
Hanging on the bridge,
And up on his hind legs
The colt so bare
Rises to stare
In the sun,
To devour the glare
Of wind and air
At once!
Oh, who did dare
Let the summer colt loose?
My babe, a dream in the darkness of womb,
Was a bubble of four-month life,

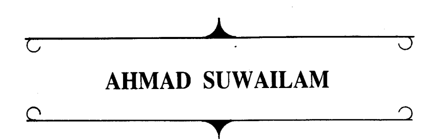
Organ by organ forming,
Of my body growing,
And, from my loins
A hot liquid flowing,
Shaped by odours of earth, streaming
In soil, in clay and mud,
Such flesh and blood.

But Oh!
Who let that summer colt loose?
He left me with loads of fruit
Asleep on trees,
With loads of birds,
Of warblers, of shouting bees!
He ran away,
He galloped,
He kicked me hard,
He swung a hoof in my baby's face
And out into the world
Without a word
Went he.

The miscarriage
Was a secret,
So horribly perfect,
Now the summer colt's gone!

A spring of gold,
Isles of silver,
Red winter birds,
Flowers and blood,
Pleats of water,
Suns, shining in pellucid eyes.
Who let the summer colt loose?





AHMAD SUWAILAM

Holes

The ears, the nose, the mouth, the eyes,
Are holes in my head
From which tobacco smoke goes up
And inane words
And very sharp looks!
Ideas in my head
Turn into steps taken
To the farthest wall in the world,
To the market-place, to side streets
And night-clubs, those small boxes
Riddled with holes
Through which 'sorrow-drops', rain-like,
Get through the roof.
My head is a night-club, a box

Riddled with holes,
Where the clouds of melancholy
Turn my heart into an overcast sky,
My future steps into a quiet crawl,
My verse into boredom.

I go out through the ears:
A voice echoing behind the clouds
Could shake the rocks in my heart,
And save me from the encompassing
Walls of sickness, and the drunken night.

I go out through my nose
To halt the advance
Of the colour dust.

Perhaps I could absorb
The rosy twilight;
Perhaps I could spin the rays of the sun
Into threads of light and peace.

I go out through the eyes
To explore many a realm of a world unknown
In search of world walls,
And virgin cities,
And pain to purify my heart,
And a dream sprouting in the fertile land;
I look for myself,

Seeking the waves that take me not to the shore
Of fear.
I leave behind my head,
That's full of holes,
But it comes after me,
Looking for me,
And after me,
It sends the Furies —
The waves, the wind,
And arms of fire and shrieks,
Which catch me in the narrow alleys
Of night, in the cracks of the earth,
Bind me up, and cut me up,
Carry me across all world walls,
All seas, and get me back in,
Through my head —
A part through the ears,
A part through the nose and mouth,
The rest through my eyes.

IZZ EL-DIN ISMAIL

Autumn

When the evening, silence-drenched
Whirls round my head,
As the dark-devoured sun, to ashes reduced,
Is dead;

When the cold wind, hurricane-howling,
Twists a heavy trunk round tree branches,
Their leaves scattering;

When a flower's head bends down, thinking,
Having danced in the breeze,
Now worry-laden, drooping;

When the tears scald a candle's heart,
Having braved the chill dark,
Now sorrow-wilted, melting;

When a handful of dust blots out
The eye of a star
Which had shone so bright;

When the evening gathers in your head
A handful of memories dear,
Rolled round in times of cheer,
But are scattered and almost dead;
When the curtain is down —
To separate two lovers,
Spelling the end and cursing
The beginning —

'Unreal was all that was,
'Though all that was
And all that will be,
'Is naked folly!'

When the glottal word is sear,
Now hoarse in the air,
Now humming round in fear
And vanishing;

When the evening, drenched in silence,
Whirls round my head,
Suspend the question
Who am I or what...

And wait
For the autumn
Will pass in peace;
And a new morn
Will drench us in light.



A Voyage

Ayenbite, and sorrow-bite, quicken a longing,
Now the wound of a day past is healing —
Hope-comforted.
In the veins of silence echoes ring,
And words throng,
About a fresh voyage,
And a pilgrimage
To banks unknown, and a land unseen,
A hinterland of what is, or ever will be!

Fall after fall on the melancholy
Road of yesterday
Left the feet scarred,
The hands bruised,

The heart bleeding,
The garb and dust stained.

The candle lit on the road
Saw a procession of phantoms;
Both men and women passed by —
But not a single brow shone,
Not a single tear dimmed an eye!
When I called on them: 'You there!
'Have you not seen my lamp gleaming,
'The oil within, light from my eyes, burning?
'It feeds on the heart's fire,
'And when the wind blows,
'It fans the flame higher!
'Can you not stop once
'To dispel the dull silence?

Oh, we heard you, they said;
Nothing new there!
Though what you say is a candle bright
Is as cold as cold fright!

They passed me by —
Ghosts vanishing into smoke,
Leaving on my road melancholy,
Leaving the sorrow they spoke!

Today I prepare my ship for sailing,

Stretching the ropes, the sails unfolding,
Farewell friends and comrades!
For mine will be a long voyage
Beyond this land and this age,
Beyond the sorrow, the tears and the sweat,
And from yesterday's dust
I keep but a handful —
A souvenir;
Perhaps when I return, if I do,
My hands will be full,
With gold pure
To fascinate the world,
To win the hearts
And dazzle the eyes.

Will Sindbad ever return?
Will the hearts ever grow green, again?

Dialogue

Glare-tanned, the green fruit grows yellow;
Ripening, the yellow fruit grows red;
The tree cannot support its freight
And the ripe fruit falls down —
Loses a shadow;
And, when the season is past,
The ripe fruit will lose all knowledge.

The slimy fish are washed ashore
Disgorged by the breaking wave
And die;
The slimy fish are helpless
In the kingdom of the wave.

The ripe fruit falls and the slimy fish die,

But the serpent emerges from an old skin —
Sloughs off the skin of the past if dry
Or too tight!
Wasn't the voice of wisdom serpentine?
For wisdom can bare itself
And the naked can see it —
Serpentine!

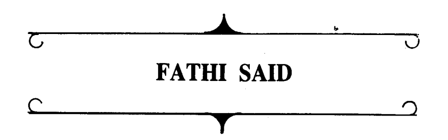
Though wisdom can slough off
The garb of falsehood
To reveal a body of a world
Indecently exposed,
The world will still
Complete its diurnal course
At 00.00 hours.

The promise of wisdom will for ever remain
Impossible to attain.

I never had power
Over the movement of the world,
Or myself,
Never been wise enough
To slough off
My skin
Year after year.

Only when I go mad
Can I possess this world and,
Dying, possess myself.





FATHI SAID

Sorrow in the City

They are sad;
Even the boughs of trees,
The windows on both sides of the street,
The raindrops, the tears,
Falling down,
In the stream of silence.

The doves are sad for their dove-cote:
For their heaven the clouds are mute;
Sorrow swells the sails
But no one wails
The ships, the wharfs and remote shacks;
No one weeps the tombs, rearing their backs.
Has sadness inspired those little babies
To weep so quiet and eyeless?

They are sad.
Even the autumnal breeze
Blowing out of season,
No earthly reason
Why the blood should freeze;
But a cry in the face of fate is audible:
This is, my God, unbearable!

They are sad.
The sunrise colours;
They have no powers;
They cannot gild the fields
Or smear the palm tree tops.

They are sad, I know.
The sunset plaits
Cannot entwine in evening roads
Or combine in the pre-sunset hour
To kiss the cheeks of the river.

They are sad.
Ears of corn so pale;
The nightingale;

They do not rise —
The hoe, the plough and the scythe.

The are sad.
Factory statuettes,
Mosque minarets,
The wind and square and the cannon reports.

They are sad.
Even the sturdy rifles
Held by heroes' hands in the trenches;
Even orchard flowers,
Songs on children's lips,
Daffodils and tulips.
And that vast vestibule
Forming a strange frown,
Moaning and groaning,
For he would drown
In tears trickling
In mystery down.

Sorrow has black finger-nails
And goring paws and claws.

O God! if only it left us alone,
So sad and undone,
So mute and so stunned,
And the people in town
Can think of nothing
But silence,
In a dark and moonless night.

They are sad.
The ribs of the stone,
The veins of the trees
Have sadness more human
Than the heart of man.

Tonight, what about?

What shall we do tonight?
Shall we feed on memories,
Let our eyes grasp the rhythm of thought,
Trap the ideas in the snare of random vision?
Shall we pull the sun down
Upon our eyes
To help them see or go blind?
Shall we get drunk tonight,
Shall we night the time out,
Drink ourselves out,
Break human shackles,
Work miracles?
Shall we climb up a horizon,
Scramble up a pathway,

Sharpen the knife of illusion,
Cut the sinews of speech
Very dead?
The body of passion!
Let us cut it up but
Feed it with our own blood!
Give it a toast of toasts
So that no leg shall be bare,
No foot shall bring in a stranger,
So that we may survive.

Tonight, what about?
At every dusk
The question wells up
What shall we do tonight?
Such a wicked question,
Please don't ask it,
To ask it is to die for it;
We shall not know, tonight,
Just as the night before,
And the night before,
Whether to laugh or sneer;
We shall have faith
Till faith is exhausted;
We shall visit the night
When all the traffickers

Have stopped,
When the bacchanals are dispersed;
Let us then direct
And redirect
Our steps
To that unfathomable sea of sable hue,
Let us sail and erect
A number of mirrors select
To reflect our images;
Let us flutter our wings
In that direction
East and west at once.

Tonight, what about?
My heart has made its exodus — it
Rang a cathedral bell,
Came down upon the kingdom
Of dead, pregnant words
Fraught with wonders
From our own Tartarus;
We are being devoured
By wolves,
Paupers of prey!
Let us implant the blade
Of the finite

Into the heart of secret sins,
Prepare the crossbows of
Folded verses;
The words of hurried
Song are blinking
As our eyelashes blink.

Tonight, what about?
Tonight, a dream
That kills itself
On lips of unrequieted love
Wearing the knightly turban
Of midnight sorrow,
As we wallow
In our blood,
Drinking, or being drunk
By blood.



AHMAD HEYKAL

From the bottom of the well

O hear me, all of you who
Planted cactus thorns in my throat!
They have begun to sprout and grow
In the arid valley of salt,
Watered from the lethal fountain of myrrh,
Making even the dumb sighs bleed;
Giving everything the taste of myrrh,
Smothering the taste of flower and weed!

You who have truned the day into night,
Confining me to a dark bottomless well,
The wound in my heart would not heal,
The fire in my breast could not die out —
A volcano ferociously alive!

For all your thorns, for all your myrrh,
For all the fierce flame in the breast,
I live on, oblivious of the open wound,
And the dark labyrinth in the bottom of the well!

The heart in my breast is far from still,
Still beating like a Christmas bell,
Declaring that a new birth is at hand,
A bottle-giant, released from a prison cell!

My brow can still bespeak rebellion,
And I still hold my head high;
My hand can still handle a sword,
Can use the spear and the axe!

Within my soul Osiris lives!
So, if you cut up my body
And burn up my bones,
And scatter my ashes
In the four corners of the earth,
Osiris-like I will return,
To turn lethal myrrh into honey
The thorns into roses!
I shall restore the original taste
Of things, engendering a sweet dawn

From the dark womb of night,
From the threads of sighs
I shall weave a sweet tune;
And decree a paradise
On the ruins of the dark well
Into which the sun rivers will flow,
And shady love-haunts
And olive branches entwined,
Overflowing with the joy of white hope,
To wipe out the black sorrow of despair;
I shall print a smile on the horizon,
Like a dawn returning,
For the dawn does return,
Does knock on the door with both hands,
Sprinkling dew drops on the threshold!
Then, heart of hearts,
Embrace the returning hope,
And the ever-returning dawn!

MALAK ABDUL-AZIZ

The Mountain

Your odour glows — a summer sun, burning,
The odour of a mountain, towering,
The odour of a mountain
In verdure clad,
By senseless winds lashed,
Firm, steadfast, urbane,
With winds all round, barbarian!

My bare head reclined 'gainst a mossy stone,
By hope caressed,
I flew to twilight horizons,
To springs gushing in the heart
Of solid rock;
To gipsy love that poured out greenness

To cover the face of a land
For long so bare and sad!
And, reclining,
A magic dream I had!

Thus hung in the silence
Seeing nought, nought hearing,
Luxuriating in the cool shade of thought,
I quenched my thirst,
And revived the colour of days.
I rose up from the abyss of despondency,
Of obfuscation and absurdity!

I crossed the bogs, the vast aridity,
The mud with the footprints rotting
And to the light flew
Transcending sorrow
To a new morrow
The faith that the world
Will one day emerge
From the jungle dim of time
To justice
In the age of Man.



NASSAR ABDULLAH

Pythagorean Meditations

1. Division from within

If you divide One
You get two halves;
Join the halves,
You get a man.
One half of me looks for the other,
Walks about the streets, the squares,
Moves among the precincts of the living,
And the graves of the dead.
Removing the coffin cover
He wonders what colour
Can a dead man's face be?
O woe to me if the other half is not yet born,
Or if the other half is dead!

2. Division from without

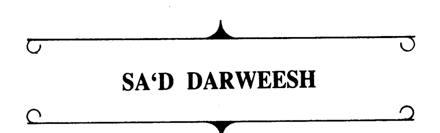
My figure is higher than me,
My figure is both you and something invisible;
O letters of mysterious words,
Crumbs of mutterings!
You are my figure,
Roving in the dark night,
Lifting the veil of words
From my face,
And pulling down the right angles!
Establish the law of life
On the parallelism of light and dark.

3. Transmigration

The future has not come.
Woe is me! I believed the promise
And extended both hands
But was saddled with the debt.

Every morning
One soul is replaced in my body by another;
Every morning,
My soul leaves my body to haunt another;
I grow shorter every morning, and longer;

I scatter and reassemble;
One day I divide from within,
The next from without.
I am reborn as pain;
I am born, I die, am reborn
Until the two promised numbers are added.
Only then could I see
The how and the where
And repay my debt.



SA'D DARWEESH

I've Committed no such Crime!☆

A conversation with my unborn son;
for Abul-Ala

To spare you all that I have seen,
The losses I have sustained,
I withstood the human impulse within;
But now, O son unborn!
Your face, as yet unattained,
Peers at me from a land unseen,

★ This is part of the famous couplet by Abul-Ala Al-Ma'arri, the ancient Arabic poet, famous for his celibacy:
My existence is father's crime,
But I've committed no such crime!

And beseechingly your eyes wonder
'How much longer?
'How much longer have I to wait?'

O Son! Futile is all waiting,
For the Sun, in the west declining,
Soon abandons the horizon!

But I want to see you, father —
A child's longing for father dear;
And to see yet one another,
Let us brave what you fear!
Often have I pored, beloved son,
Over boys names, trying,
In the quiet of an evening
To pick you one!

Long have my weak, unarmed arms
Fancied hugging you
But, darling fledgeling,
I wanted to save you,
To spare you all I have been through!

Many a high wave,
Alone I did brave,
In times tempestuous!
I forfieted home and byre
For deserts far and dire;

From the evening breeze turned away
After the scorching noontide journey,
Put out my lantern and threw away
May laurels on my triumphal day —
And killed in myself the survival instinct.

O Father! how unfair!
You kill two souls with a sword of mercy —
But how painful mercy can be
If offered in charity!
You gave me no choice, father,
Though life I would have rather,
Perhaps I shall have what you haven't,
Perforce it will be different!

And, father, when I come, if I do,
I shall be none but you,
A name that lives on
When you are gone!
No man can hate to see
His shadow cast on life,
His life become eternity

No man can hate to see
A life become eternity,

And all of us, my son,
Love to live on —
We love life and hate death.
But I do fear that you,
Choked with life's miseries,
Will cry, 'Father's Crime!
'He indifferently
'Surrendered me!
'A blind and frail moment
'Has plunged me
'In times of fearful agony!'

O Son!
Life is an old game
Perpetually oscillating
Between being and unbeing;
It is a barren wordy play
With tears opening
On pain closing!
I fear for you, my son!
For, between the tears of the opening
And the groans of the closing
There's a vast abyss yawning
A sea turbulent—and
To fall down



Is to drown!
We die; that much we know;
But where do we thence go?
And as in the eyes
The last ray dies
The disillusion brightens
And a bitter question:
Why were we ever born to die?

All this, father, I've always known!
Why must I let you sail
In time alone!?
My heart should fail
If we were unable
To recover the time now gone,
The years irretrievable!
I crave to be born
In your vernal year
To be there at your side
When your friends disappear;
I should show you a different love
From all that women can give;
Love, free — unhypocritical!
You should feel as your end draws near
That life was not in vain,

That you planted a flower
Before the evening hour!

Why not live and ask not why?
Can't we ignore the question
Whence we came and whither we go?
Look at the sun!
He never asks why do I rise
How do I set?
A mystery —
We have to live with it!

O Son! you do put me to shame!
Perhaps I am to blame,
Though, let me whisper this to you:
Twice was your father in love
And he loved as no man
Did ever love:
With a mind and a heart so fresh,
With bones and blood and flesh!
I nearly saw your face —
Twice I was denuded,
Twice your mother betrayed!

O Father! two women you may forget!

Couldn't you have found
In the course of a long journey
A woman who'd never betray?
You could've — and seen my face!
Women aren't such a sinning race!

We have no choice, my Son,
Or so we have been told,
To fall or not to fall in love!
For love, my simple son,
Cannot be bought or sold.
It has a fate-like quality,
Coming when it will,
With a touch of finality,
A storm, or a passion mild;
Life's candle, my child,
May melt before it will!
Love is, my innocent child,
A gift from heaven to man,
It droppeth from heaven,
Like sunshine or rain!

O Father dear, I long to see you still,
I crave the warm thrill
Of your embrace,

I long to see your face;
And I will wait,
May the waiting be not long.
Like the leaves vernal
Of a green perennial
The heart of a poet will quiver
Even to a morning whisper,
And so I shall see you,
I know,
My waiting can't be long!



MAXIME FARAG MAXIME

River of Sorrow

Will no one knock
On my door
My friends?
My sorrow!
My friends surrendered me this night;
I never knew such a longing
For man
Until I was alone with you!
The sails of my books
Are torn up
And in your flood sank down;
The wings of dreams are laid bare, and
Broken down, trodden by your horsemen
Are the ghosts of the dead.

The voices of our loves
Are burnt up
In the terror
Of your infernal vessels!

My Sorrow!
How cruel are you this night,
How savage!
You have the face of hunger,
And generate the pains of Jesus!
I demand not your forgiveness —
I cannot demand what you haven't,
I cannot even bow my head to you,
But, my sorrow,
Will you put me to bed...

My sorrow!
My friends surrendered me this night;
With his own hands,
He, the man with bribed kisses,
Judas, surrendered me
To the circles of Pilate;
And Pilate, the effiminate heart,
Released Barabbas, but tied me up,

Extended a hand to the jar of blood
And washed his hands in my blood —
My guilt —
To wash his hands of my blood!
Pilate gave me to the Roman soldiers
Who took me in a wedding procesion
Up immoral hills
Carrying the hearse of man's 'ways'!
The Roman soldiers took pity
On my naked body,
And covered it with a robe of my blood!
The Roman soldiers took pity
On my bare head:
They gave me a crown of thorns!
The Roman soldiers took pity
On my sick heart
— My heart's sickness is memory —
And gave me a draught of vinegar!
The Roman soldiers crucified me!

When I cried 'Eli, Eli!'
The Roman soldiers surrendered me
To him that has a grave
And asked him to guard me
Dead.

He kept watch over me.
The Roman soldiers surrendered me this night
To you, my fate,
O king of Sorrows!

Poetry is not forthcoming this year,
And I cannot wait for the rain,
Nor for the rain-pregnant cloud!

Notes

1. *Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975*
2. *Nirmod: Arabic Literature, Then and Now*, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Volume 24 No. 2, Spring / Summer 1981, pp. 123-128.
3. Badawi, *Op. Cit.*
4. Cf. especially al-Aqqad's شعراء مصر وبيئاتهم فى الجيل الماضى Cairo, third edition, 1965.
5. In the *Preface* to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.
6. Sincerity as a romantic ideal is discussed in detail by David Perkins in his *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity*, Cambridge, Mass., 1964.
7. Al-Aqqad did this himself in some of his poems, as in كواء الثياب ليلة الأحد – ديوان عابر سبيل Cairo, n.d.
8. Muhammad Abdul-Hayy studied this in detail in his Ph. D. thesis, Oxford, which was yet unpublished when I read it in 1978.
9. Cf. Dr. Muhammad Mandur's فى الميزان الجديد where he introduces this concept and gives various examples from contemporary Arabic verse.
10. Cf. Badawi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 224. Lewis Awad's *Plutoland* appeared in 1947.
11. *Ibid.* 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' may be singled out as a seminal essay the main ideas of which permeated the critical scene, especially in academic circles, beginning with A. El-Gammal's M.A. Thesis 'Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot: A Comparative Study', Cairo, 1960 (unpublished) and up tc M.S. Farid's M.A. thesis 'The Impersonal Theory of Poetry: A

omparative Study of the Critical Works of T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot', Cairo 1972, (unpublished), both supervised by Rashad Rushdi. On the other hand there was the anti-Eliotic 'school' led by Mandur, Hilal and al-Qitt who advocated a social function of poetry—ironically the title of an essay by T.S. Eliot.

12. *Poetry* magazine, Chigaco, March 1913, cited in *Imagist Poetry,* ed. Peter Jones, Penguin, 1985 edn.
13. *Ibid.*
14. A. A. Hijazi, مدينة بلا قلب *(A Heartless City)*, Beirut, 1961, p. 125.
15. Abdul-Saboor, ديوان صلاح عبد الصبور *(Complete Works)*, Beirut, 1972, p. 235.
16. *Poetry* magazine, Chicago, March 1913, cited in Jones, *Op. Cit.*
17. Abdul-Saboor, حياتى فى الشعر *(My Life in Poetry)*, Beirut, 1969, p. 91.
18. Cf. Ayer's *Central Questions of Philosophy*, Penguin, 1984 edn.
19. Hijazi, *Op. Cit*,. p. 188.
20. London, Faber and Faber, 1951, p. 23.
21. Abdul-Saboor, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 236-7.
22. W. H. Auden, *Op. Cit.*
23. G. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1964 (3rd printing 1967).
24. H. Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth,* Oxford, 1950.
25. Cf. Wordsworth's *Little Prelude* (in M. Enani's *Dialectic of Memory,* Cairo, 1981) where the famous lines occur:

    There are in our existence spots of time
    Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
    A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
    By trivial occupations and the round
    Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
    (Especially the imaginative power)
    Are nourished and invislbly repaired.
    i. 288-249 (*Prel.* 1805, xi, 258 *et Seq.*)

26. 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms' in *English Romantic Poets,* ed. M. H. Abrams, O.U.P., 1975.
27. Abdul-Saboor, *Op. Cit.* 127-8
28. M. M. Enani, الادب وفنونه Cairo, 1984.
29. *Poetry* Magazine, April, 1915, cited in Jones (ed,) *Op. Cit.*

30. This is Qudama Ibn Ja'far's definition which influenced many generations of Arabic poets. Cf. M. Mandur's examination of it in his monumental المنهجى عند العرب Cairo, n.d.
31. A glaring example of the traditionalist views is to be found in Dr. Y. Khulayf's introduction to his only volume of verse نداء القمم Cairo, n.d.
32. Quoted in *Ezra Pound: A Close-Up* by Michael Reck, Rupert Hart-Davies, 1968, pp. 14-15.
33. Cf. Introduction to Peter Jones (ed.) *Op. Cit.*, p. 14.
34. Cf. The studies undertaken by Dr. Ahmad Mustageer in the Cairene literary monthly إبداع Nov. 1985 and the الشعر magazine nos. 39 & 40, 1985 where he attempts an original interpretation of modern Arabic verse in the light of a novel mathematical approach; also Dr. Kamal Abu Deeb's study البنية الايقاعية للشعر العربى: نحو بديل جذرى لعروض الخليل بن احمد Beirut, 1974 (second impression 1981) where he attempts an assessment of Arabic metres on the basis of 'stress' rather than 'Quantity'.
35. Cf. M. M. Enani, *Varieties of Irony: An Essay on Modern English Poetry*, Cairo, 1986.
36. Cairo, Madbuli, 1979.
37. Although some of the poems appear undated, the poet had given me a list of their dates of composition.
38. Ford Madox Hueffer, cited in Jones (ed.) *Op. Cit.*
39. Cf. C. Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, O.U.P., 1963, where this figure is discussed at length.
40. Cf. F. Marsh, *Wordsworth's Imagery: A Study in Poetic Vision*, New Haven, 1952, where metaphor is defined in terms of the nature of expression peculiar to the ancient languages before semantic distinctions reduced 'live' figures of speech to dead ones. She argues that the poet's task is to revive the 'semantic conglomerations' which had ceased to have a metaphoric effect, with the help of 'combinative' and syntactic devices. Being an ancient language, Arabic is full of these 'semantic conglomerations' and without realizing it we use the verbal signs in denotation in disregard of their metaphoric origin and connotations. This is, of course, too vast a subject to be dealt with in a footnote, but an example could illustrate the point. One of the commonest idioms in classical Arabic is the verb اكسب and the different اورث (to make someone or something gain) and (to leave or bequeath to) respectively, as used in the sense of (to give). Idiomatic Arabic prefers اكسب الموضوع اهمية to اعطى

الموضوع أهمية and أورثنى الزمان الهم to أعطانى الزمان الهم, in each case the original metaphoric sense in the idiomatic sentence hardly felt at all. It is quite common to use يكسب (to gain) and its derivatives اكسب and اكتسب not in the sense of gain at all: so does Abdul - Saboor in his 'Dreams of the Ancient Knight':

كون خلا من الوسامة
اكسبنى التعتيم والجهامة
حين سقطت فوقه فى مطلع الصبا

A universe devoid of beauty
Gave me gloom and bleakness
when I fell down on it, in early youth!

And you could substitute أورثنى with hardly any change to the meaning; but then the original does not say 'gave me', but, literally, 'made me gain'. And the literal meaning is important insofar as it brings to life the old metaphor with its paradox and the resulting ironic tone.

41. Cf. Introduction to the *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English,* vol. 2, London, 1984, where the 'metaphoric idiom' is discussed.
42. القاهرة (Cairo) magazine, Nov. 19, 1985.
43. Cf. Eliot's essay on *Hamlet* (1919), in *Selected Essays,* London, Faber and Faber, 1966 edn.
44. الأهرام newspaper, August 31, 1979.
45. Lewis Awad, *Ibid.*
46. Abdul-Qadir Al-Qitt, Beirut, الاتجاه الوجدانى فى الشعر العربى المعاصر second edition 1981.
47. Lewis Awad, *Op. Cit.*
48. Consider for instance the opening verse of the second chapter *(Surah)* of the Quran (*Al-Baqarah* = The Cow). The meaning can have two or more variations owing to the 'liquid syntax' used. The auxiliary 'to be' does not appear in the surface structure of Arabic at all in the present tense, though it exists at the deep structure level, as becomes apparent when you put the formula noun + to be + noun in the past. This is the verse:

ذلك الكتاب لا ريب فيه هدى للمتقين

Now if you insert an 'is' after the initial pronoun, you get the following meaning:

This is the book,
No room for doubt in it,
A guidance to the pious.

If, on the other hand, you choose to assume that the auxiliary ought to be elsewhere, you can get the following meaning:

This book, no doubt,
Is a guidance to the pious.

You could even assume that فيه (in it) relates more to the following than to the previous phrase, thereby getting this meaning:

This is the book, no doubt;
In it there is a guidance to the pious.

49 C. ricks, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 78-82.

50. The term occurs in the famous lines in Chapter IV of *Biographia Literaria* where Coleridge praises Wordsworth s 'original gift of spreading the tone, the *atmosphere* and with it the depth and height of the ideal world'; ed. G. Watson, Everyman, 1965, p. 48.

51. Cf. Dr. Abdul-Aziz al-Muqalih's Introduction to the poet's *Complete Works*, Beirut, 1985.

52. Donqul's *Complete Poetical Works*, الاعمال الشعرية الكاملة p. 324.

53. Cf. Marin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd*, (third edition, Pelican Books, 1983) where he traces the 'tendency to illogicality' to popular sources; Tewfiq al-Hakeem agrees: cf. Introduction to يا طالع الشجرة , Cairo, 1962.

54. Cf. M. Enani, 'Arnoldian Paradox: Notes on Wordsworth's Metaphor of the Mind', in *The Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts*, Cairo Univeresity, vol. XXXII, 1978.

55. Cf. M. Enani's Introduction to his English translation of *The Trial of an Unknown Man*, Cairo, State Publishing House, 1985.

56. اصداء الناى Cairo, 1980.

Notes

on the contributors

By

M.S. Farid

ABDUL-AZIZ, Malak. Poet and wife to the late distinguished critic Muhammad Mandur; author of one collection of short stories, *Torn Socks*.

ABDULLAH, Nassar. Poet, critic and translator. Lecturer in philosophy at the Faculty of Arts, Souhag, in Upper Egypt. Born 24 December 1945 in Badari, Assyout Governorate. Graduated from the Faculty of Economics and Political Science in 1966. B.A., M.A., and Ph. D. in Philosophy from the Faculty of Arts, University of Cairo. Before Joining the army worked as editor at the State Information Service, then as economic researcher at the Central Bank of Egypt. Fought in the wars with Israel in 1969, 1970 and 1973. Volumes of verse include: *My Heart, a Lost Child; Sorrows of the Early Ages* (awarded a State Prize); and *I asked his Handsome Face,* 1985. Translated Bertrand Russel's *Nightamres of Eminent Men* into Arabic.

ABDUL-SABOOR, Salah (3 May 1931-14 August 1981)
Leading Poet of his generation. Born in Zaqaazeeq, Sharqiyyah Governorate. Graduated from the Department of Arabic, Faculty of Arts, University of Cairo in 1951. Worked in teaching and journalism, serving on the staff of the Cairene weekly *Rose-el-Yusuf* and then in al-Ahram

newspaper. Edited a mumber of literary magazines. Cultural Counsellor in India 1977-78. At the time of his death was chairman of the Board of Directors of the State Publishing House and National Library in Cairo. Volumes of poetry include *People in my* Country, *1957 I Say unto You*, 1961; *The Dreams of the Ancient Knight*, 1964; *Meditations on a Wounded Time*, 1970; *Night Trees*, 1972; *Sailing into Memory*, *1979 The Complete poems* (Beirut). *A Journey into the Night* is a selection of his poems with an English translation on the opposite pages. Author of five verse dramas: The Tragedy al-Hallaj, 1964 (Murder in Baghdad is the English version by Dr. Khalil Samaan); *Night Traveller*, 1969 (English version by Dr. M. M. Enani, State Publishing House, Cairo, with an Introduction by Dr. Samir Sarhan) *The Princess Waits*, 1970 (English translation by Dr. Shafiq Megally, State Publishing House, Cairo); *Leila and al-Majnoun* (the madman), 1969; *After the king Dies*, 1972. The first of those plays won a State Prize. Works of criticism and literary journalism include: *Voices of the Age*, 1960; *National Thoughts*, 1960: *What will Remain of them in History*, 1961; *That We may Conquer Death*, 1963; *My Life in Poetry*, 1969; *And the Word Remains*, 1969; *Journeys on Paper*, 1971; *Story of the Modern Egyptian Conscience*, 1972; *City of Love and Wisdom; Broken Women; Writings on the Wind* (reprinted, with an introduction by Dr. Izz El-Din Ismail in 1982 as *The Pulse of Thought*) · *Nearing Fifty*, 1983. Edited a selection from the poetry of Ali Mahmoud Taha, with an introduction, in 1969. Translations into Arabic include Ibsen's *Master Builder* and T.S.Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*.

ABU-SINNAH, Muhammad Ibrahim. Poet. Born in a small village, Giza Governorate, in 1937. Graduated from the Faculty of Arabic Studies, University of al-Azhar, in 1964. Joined the army before working as political editor at the State Information Service. Member of the Association of Egyptian Writers. Supervisor of literary programmes at the Egyptian Broadcasting Station. Like Farooq Shoosha, a prominent announcer, presenter of cultural programmes and mediaman. Volumes of poetry include: *My Heart and the Spinner of the Blue Dress, 1965 Winter Garden, 1969 Screaming into Ancient Wells, 1974 Fighters*, 1974; *Evening Bells*, 1975; *Meditations on Petrified Cities*, 1979; *The Sea is our Rendezvous*, 1982; *The Poetical Works*, 1985. Has two verse plays to his credit: *Hamzah of the Arabs* and *The Siege of the Citadel*, 1985. Studies and works of Criticism include *The Philosophy of Folk Proverbs*, 1968; *Studies in Arabic Poetry*, 1979; *Immortal Poems*, 1981; *Voices and Echoes*.

DARWEESH, Sa'd. Born in Tala, Menoufiyyah Governorate, in 1923. Graduated from the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Cairo, in 1945. Taught in Egypt and Iraq. In the course of a distinguished Civil Service career he served as director, Department of Foreign Cultural Relations, Ministry of Higher Education; Examiner of literary texts at the Egyptian Television; Director General of publications at the State Publishing House; Under-Secretary, Ministry of Culture, responsible for Publication and Scientific Centres. Currently Adviser on Cultural and Literary Projects at the State Publishing House. Member of the Association of Egyptian Writers and the Poetry Committee of the Higher Cultural Council. A book of verse *That Absent Face* appeared in 1984.

DONQOL, Amal. Born in Luxor, Upper Egypt. Self-taught. Obtained a Ministry of Culture grant for creative writing. Volumes of poetry include: *Crying Before Zarqaa al-Yamama*, 1969; *A Comment on Current Events*, 1971; *Moon Murder*, 1974; *Future Testament*, 1975; *Colloquies in a Closed Room*, 1979; *Notes from Roon No. 8*, 1983; *New Reports of the War of Basous*, and after his death in 1983 a *Collected poems* appeared.

GUWAIDA, Farooq. Born 1945. poet and Cultural Editor of Al-Ahram newspaper. Volumes of poetry include: *Leaves from the Garden of October*, 1974; *Stay, Love !* 1975; *Love will always Remain*, 1977; *Longings will be Back*, 1978; *In Your Eyes is My Address*, 1979; *Always will You Dwell in my Heart*, 1981. *Egyptian Funds and How They Were Squandered*, 1967 is economic history. *Land of Magic and Phantasy*, 1981, is an account of a journey to India. A recent Verse play, *A Vizier in Love*, 1981, was a great success on the stage both in Egypt and in a number of Arab countries.

HEYKAL, Ahmad. poet, critic and scholar. Currently Minister of Culture of Egypt. Professor of Arabic at Dar el-Uloum College, University of Cairo. and an authority on Andalusian studies. Born in Zaqazeeq, Sharqiyyah Governorate, in 1922. Ph.D. in 1955 From the University of Madrid. Member of the Higher Council of the Egyptian Radio and Television. Served as Cultural Counsellor in the Arab League, and was Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cairo. His Volume of Verse *Echoes of the Flute* appeared in 1980.

HIJAZI, Ahmad Abul-Mu'ti. Like Salah Abdul-Saboor, a leading poet of his generation. Born in a small village in Lower Egypt in 1935. Read

Arabic at Teachers' Training College in Cairo. Lives in France. His early socialism was enriched by exposure to modernist tendencies in European, especially French, literature. Volumes of poetry include *A Heartless City; It Remains only to Confess; Uras; An Elegy for the Beautiful Years;. The Collected Poems.* A recent volume of poems is *Creatures of the Kingdom of Night. Muhammad and These* is a study of the figure of prophet Muhammad in modern Arabic literature.

ISMAIL, Izz el-Din. Poet, critic and editor of the literary Journal *Fusul.* Currently President of the Academy of Arts. professor of Arabic at Ein-Shams University, Cairo. Works of criticism include *Aesthetic Principles of Arabic Criticism, 1955 Literary Genres,* 1955; *Psychological Interpretation of Literature; Poetry in a Revolutionary Age,* 1966; *Contemporary Arabic Poetry,* 1967; *Nationalist Poetry in the Sudan; Sudanese Folk-Tales; First Components of Arabic Culture; Contemporary Yemeni Poetry; Art and Man; Quranic Verses on the Soul of Man; The Spirit of the Age,* 1972; *Human Issues in Contemporary Dramatic Literature,* 1980, *Literary and Linguistic Sources of the Arabic Heritage,* 1980; *On Abbasid poetry: Vision and Art,* 1980. A book of travel is *Twenty Days in Nubia.* His verse play was rendered into English by Dr. M.M. Enani as *The Trial of an Unknown Man,* State Publishing House, 1985, Translations into Arabic include E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and a modern Soviet novel.

JAHEEN, Salah. Poet, professional cartoonist of Al-Ahram newspaper, script and song writer. Volumes of poetry include: *A Word of Peace,* 1955; *A Ballad for the Suez Canal* 1956; *Of the Moon and the Clay,* 1961; *Rubaiyyat,* 1962; *Clippings,* 1966; *The Collected Poems,* 1977. A recent volume is *September Tunes,* 1984. Uses the Vernacular. Wrote for the puppet theatre.

MATAR, Muhammad Afifi. Born in 1930 in Menoufiyyah Governorate. Graduated in philosophy from Ein-Shams University. Cairo. Edited a regional literary magazine *Ears of Corn,* but it has ceased publication. Taught in Egypt and worked for a mumber of years in Iraq. Volumes of poetry include *Diary of Silence; Features of the Empedoclean Face.*

MAXIME M. Farag. Born in Maghagha, Upper Egypt, in 1939. Works for the State Publishing House. One of the four contributors to a volume of poems *Migration from the Four Corners of the Earth,* Cairo, 1970. Author of a volume of poems, *Palestine, my Love!* and a frequent contributor to literary magazines and radio programmes.

QANDEEL, Ali. A young poet whose untimely death in 1975 caused much grief. A posthumous volume is *The Rising Beings of Ali Qandeel.*

SAID, Fathi. Born 1980 Poet and journalist on the staff of the Radio and TV magazine. Volumes of poetry include: *But not Poetry, my Lord,* 1980; *A Little of this Agate will Suffice* 1981; *Traveller to Eternity* 1979; and *The Eloquent Peasant,* a verse drama,1982.His firstVolume of versewas *A chapter in a tale,* 1966.

SHOOSHA, Farooq. Born in Damietta, 1936. Graduated from the Dar el-Uloum College, University of Cairo, in 1956, and obtained a Teachers Training Diploma from Ein-Shams University in 1957. Taught Arabic for a short spell at a preparatory School. Well known as broadcaster and presenter of cultural programmes. Supervisor of literary programmes at the Egyptian Broadcasting Station. Volumes of Poetry include: *To a Departing Love,* 1966; *Burnt Eyes,* 1972; *A Pearl in the Heart,* 1973; a complete works has recently been published (1985). Other works are: *Words on the Road; Our Beautiful Language and the problems of Modern Times,* 1979. Edited; *The Most Beautiful Twenty Love Poems in Arabic;* and *The Most Beautiful Twenty Poems of Divine Love in* Arabic; A new volume of verse *The Language of Lovers' Blood* is appearing shortly.

SOROOR, Nageeb. Poet, dramatist and producer. Volumes of poetry include: *Protocols of the Elders of Cafe Riche* and *Rubaiyyat of Nageeb Soroor.* A dramatic trilogy *Yaseen and Bahiyya,* 1965, *O Night, O Moon!* 1968, and *May the Eye of Heaven be not too Hot!* 1972 was successfully staged. A later play was *O for People,* 1976, staged posthumously, in 1985.

SUWAILAM, Ahmad. Poet and dramatist. Born in 1942. Graduated from the Faculty of Commerce in 1966. Volumes of Poetry include: *The Road and the Perplexed Heart,* 1967; *In Search of the Unknown Circle,* 1973; *Night and the Memory of Sheets,* 1977; *Going out to the River,* 1980. Wrote two verse plays, *Akhenaton,* 1980, and *Shahryar,* 1983. His most recent volume of verse is *Travel and Medallions,* 1985. works of criticism: *Our Classical* Poetry *from a Modern perspective,* 1981; *Woman in the poetry of al-Bayyati,* 1984. Winner of a number of literary Awards. Also writes for children.

WAGDY, Wafaa. (Ms) Born in Port said. Graduated from the Higher Institute of Theatre Arts, Department of Drama, in 1969. Volumes of poetry include *What it Means to be a Stranger,* 1967; *A Vision beyond the*

Wound, 1973; *Love in Our Time*, 1980 (With an introduction by Dr. M.M.Enani). Represented Egypt at the Second Arabic Poetry Meeting in Beirut, 1975. Her only verse drama is *The Seven Gates of Beisan*. 1984. A fourth volume of verse *Ploughing the sea* appeared in the same year.

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